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Wishing my darling
Dorothy a Happy Birthday
Mother.

February 18th 1930.



THE DAY OF THE DOG



SWALLOW

Frontispiece

THE DAY OF THE DOG
—
THE FLYERS
—
THE PURPLE PARASOL
—
HER WEIGHT IN GOLD

BY
GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1916

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THE DAY OF THE DOG

PART I

"I'll catch the first train back this evening, Graves. Wouldn't go down there if it were not absolutely necessary; but I have just heard that Mrs. Delancy is to leave for New York to-night, and if I don't see her to-day there will be a pack of troublesome complications. Tell Mrs. Graves she can count me in on the box party to-night."

We'll need you, Crosby. Don't miss the train."

"I'll be at the station an hour before the train leaves. Confound it, it's a mean trip down there—three hours through the rankest kind of scenery and three hours back. She's visiting in the country, too, but I can drive out and back in an hour."

"On your life, old man, don't fail me."

"Don't worry, Graves; all Christendom couldn't keep me in Dexter after four o'clock this afternoon. Good-by." And Crosby climbed into the hansom and was driven away at breakneck speed toward the station.

Crosby was the junior member of the law firm of Rolfe & Crosby, and his trip to the country was on business connected with the settlement of a big estate.

Mrs. Delancy, widow of a son of the decedent, was one of the legatees, and she was visiting her sister-in-law, Mrs. Robert Austin, in central Illinois. Mr. Austin owned extensive farming interests near Dexter, and his handsome home was less than two miles from the heart of the town. Crosby anticipated no trouble in driving to the house and back in time to catch the afternoon train for Chicago. It was necessary for Mrs. Delancy to sign certain papers, and he was confident the transaction could not occupy more than half an hour's time.

At 11:30 Crosby stepped from the coach to the station platform in Dexter, looked inquiringly about, and then asked a perspiring man with a star on his suspender-strap where he could hire a horse and buggy. The officer directed him to a "feed-yard and stable," but observed that there was a "funeral in town an' he'd be lucky if he got a rig, as all of Smith's horses were out." Application at the stable brought the first frown to Crosby's brow. He could not rent a "rig" until after the funeral, and that would make it too late for him to catch the four o'clock train for Chicago. To make the story short, twelve o'clock saw him trudging along the dusty road covering the two miles between town and Austin's place, and he was walking with the rapidity of one who has no love for the beautiful. The early spring air was invigorating, and it did not take him long to reduce the distance. Austin's house stood on a hill, far back from the highway, and overlooking the entire country-side.

The big red barn stood in from the road a hun-

dred yards or more, and he saw that the same driveway led to the house on the hill. There was no time for speculation, so he hastily made his way up the lane. Crosby had never seen his client, their business having been conducted by mail or through Mr. Rolfe. There was not a person in sight, and he slowed his progress considerably as he drew nearer the big house. At the barn-yard gate he came to a full stop and debated within himself the wisdom of inquiring at the stables for Mr. Austin.

He flung open the gate and strode quickly to the door. This he opened boldly and stepped inside, finding himself in a lofty carriage room. Several handsome vehicles stood at the far end, but the wide space near the door was clear. The floor was as "clean as a pin," except along the west side. No one was in sight, and the only sound was that produced by the horses as they munched their hay and stamped their hoofs in impatient remonstrance with the flies.

"Where the deuce are the people?" he muttered as he crossed to the mangers. "Devilish queer," glancing about in considerable doubt. "The hands must be at dinner or taking a nap." He passed by a row of mangers and was calmly inspected by brown-eyed horses. At the end of the long row of stalls he found a little gate opening into another section of the barn. He was on the point of opening this gate to pass in among the horses when a low growl attracted his attention. In some alarm he took a precautionary look ahead. On the opposite side of the gate stood a huge and vicious looking bulldog, unchained and wait-

ing for him with an eager ferocity that could not be mistaken. Mr. Crosby did not open the gate. Instead he inspected it to see that it was securely fastened, and then drew his hand across his brow.

"What an escape!" he gasped, after a long breath. "Lucky for me you growled, old boy. My name is Crosby, my dear sir, and I'm not here to steal anything. I'm only a lawyer. Anybody else at home but you?"

An ominous growl was the answer, and there was lurid disappointment in the face of the squat figure beyond the gate.

"Come, now, old chap, don't be nasty. I won't hurt you. There was nothing farther from my mind than a desire to disturb you. And say, please do something besides growl. Bark, and oblige me. You may attract the attention of some one."

By this time the ugly brute was trying to get at the man, growling, and snarling savagely. Crosby complacently looked on from his place of safety for a moment, and was on the point of turning away when his attention was caught by a new move on the part of the dog. The animal ceased his violent efforts to get through the gate, turned about deliberately, and raced from view behind the horse stalls. Crosby brought himself up with a jerk.

"Thunder," he ejaculated; "the brute knows a way to get at me, and he won't be long about it, either. What the dickens shall I—by George, this looks serious! He'll head me off at the door if I try to get out and—Ah, the fire-escape! We'll fool

you, you brute! What a cursed idiot I was not to go to the house instead of coming—" He was shining up a ladder with little regard for grace as he mumbled this self-condemnatory remark. There was little dignity in his manner of flight, and there was certainly no glory in the position in which he found himself a moment later. But there was a vast amount of satisfaction.

The ladder rested against a beam that crossed the carriage shed near the middle. The beam was a large one, hewn from a monster tree, and was free on all sides. The ladder had evidently been left there by men who had used it recently and had neglected to return it to the hooks on which it properly hung.

When the dog rushed violently through the door and into the carriage room, he found a vast and inexplicable solitude. He was, to all appearances, alone with the vehicles under which he was permitted to trot when his master felt inclined to grant the privilege.

Crosby, seated on the beam, fifteen feet above the floor, grinned securely but somewhat dubiously as he watched the mystified dog below. At last he laughed aloud. He could not help it. The enemy glanced upward and blinked his red eyes in surprise; then he stared in deep chagrin, then glared with rage. For a few minutes Crosby watched his frantic efforts to leap through fifteen feet of altitudinal space, confidently hoping that some one would come to drive the brute away and liberate him. Finally he began to lose the good humor his strategy in fooling the

dog had inspired, and a hurt, indignant stare was directed toward the open door through which he had entered.

"What's the matter with the idiots?" he growled impatiently. "Are they going to let this poor dog snarl his lungs out? He's a faithful chap, too, and a willing worker. Gad, I never saw anything more earnest than the way he tries to climb up that ladder." Adjusting himself in a comfortable position, his elbows on his knees, his hands to his chin, he allowed his feet to swing lazily, tantalizingly, below the beam. "I'm putting a good deal of faith in this beam," he went on resignedly. The timber was at least fifteen inches square.

"Ah, by George! That was a bully jump—the best you've made. You didn't miss me more than ten feet that time. I don't like to be disrespectful, you know, but you are an exceedingly rough looking dog. Don't get huffy about it, old fellow, but you have the ugliest mouth I ever saw. Yes, you miserable cur, politeness at last ceases to be a virtue with me. If I had you up here I'd punch your face for you, too. Why don't you come up, you coward? You're bow-legged, too, and you haven't any more figure than a crab. Anybody that would take an insult like that is beneath me (thank heaven!) and would steal sheep. Great Scott! Where are all these people? Shut up, you brute, you! I'm getting a headache. But it doesn't do any good to reason with you, I can see that plainly. The thing I ought to do is to go down there

and punish you severely. But I'll—Hello! Hey, boy? Call off this——confounded dog."

Two small Lord Fauntleroy boys were standing in the door, gazing up at him with wide open mouths and bulging eyes.

"Call him off, I say, or I'll come down there and kick a hole clear through him." The boys stared all the harder. "Is your name Austin?" he demanded, addressing neither in particular.

"Yes, sir," answered the larger boy, with an effort.

"Well, where's your father? Shut up, you brute! Can't you see I'm talking? Go tell your father I want to see him, boy."

"Dad's up at the house."

"That sounds encouraging. Can't you call off this dog?"

"I—I guess I'd better not. That's what dad keeps him for."

"Oh, he does, eh? And what is it that he keeps him for?"

"To watch tramps."

"To watch—to watch tramps? Say, boy, I'm a lawyer and I'm here on business." He was black in the face with indignation.

"You better come up to the house and see dad, then. He don't live in the barn," said the boy keenly.

"I can't fly to the house, boy. Say, if you don't call off this dog I'll put a bullet through him."

"You'd have to be a purty good shot, mister. Nearly everybody in the county has tried to do it."

Both boys were grinning diabolically and the dog took on energy through inspiration. Crosby longed for a stick of dynamite.

"I'll give you a dollar if you get him away from here."

"Let's see your dollar." Crosby drew a silver dollar from his trousers pocket, almost falling from his perch in the effort.

"Here's the coin. Call him off," gasped the lawyer.

"I'm afraid papa wouldn't like it," said the boy. The smaller lad nudged his brother and urged him to "take the money anyhow."

"I live in Chicago," Crosby began, hoping to impress the boys at least.

"So do we when we're at home," said the smaller boy. "We live in Chicago in the winter time."

"Is Mrs. Delancy your aunt?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll give you this dollar if you'll tell your father I'm here and want to see him at once."

"Throw down your dollar." The coin fell at their feet but rolled deliberately through a crack in the floor and was lost forever. Crosby muttered something unintelligible, but resignedly threw a second coin after the first.

"He'll be out when he gets through dinner," said the older boy, just before the fight. Two minutes later he was streaking across the barn lot with the coin in his pocket, the smaller boy wailing under the woe of a bloody nose. For half an hour Crosby

heaped insult after insult upon the glowering dog at the bottom of the ladder and was in the midst of a rabid denunciation of Austin when the city-bred farmer entered the barn.

"Am I addressing Mr. Robert Austin?" called Crosby, suddenly amiable. The dog subsided and ran to his master's side. Austin, a black-moustached, sallow-faced man of forty, stopped near the door and looked aloft, squinting.

"Where are you?" he asked somewhat sharply.

"I am very much up in the air," replied Crosby. "Look a little sou' by sou'east. Ah, now you have me. Can you manage the dog? If so, I'll come down."

"One moment, please. Who are you?"

"My name is Crosby, of Rolfe & Crosby, Chicago. I am here to see Mrs. Delancy, your sister-in-law, on business before she leaves for New York."

"What is your business with her, may I ask?"

"Private," said Crosby laconically. "Hold the dog."

"I insist in knowing the nature of your business," said Austin firmly.

"I'd rather come down there and talk, if you don't mind."

"I don't but the dog may," said the other grimly.

"Well, this is a nice way to treat a gentleman," cried Crosby wrathfully.

"A gentleman would scarcely have expected to find a lady in the barn, much less on a cross-beam. This is where my horses and dogs live."

"Oh, that's all right now; this isn't a joke, you know."

"I quite agree with you. What is your business with Mrs. Delancy?"

"We represent her late husband's interests in settling up the estate of his father. Your wife's interests are being looked after by Morton & Rogers, I believe. I am here to have Mrs. Delancy go through the form of signing papers authorizing us to bring suit against the estate in order to establish certain rights of which you are fully aware. Your wife's brother left his affairs slightly tangled, you remember."

"Well, I can save you a good deal of trouble. Mrs. Delancy has decided to let the matter rest as it is and to accept the compromise terms offered by the other heirs. She will not care to see you, for she has just written to your firm announcing her decision."

"You—you don't mean it," exclaimed Crosby in dismay. He saw a prodigious fee slipping through his fingers. "Gad, I must see her about this," he went on, starting down the ladder, only to go back again hastily. The growling dog leaped forward and stood ready to receive him. Austin chuckled audibly.

"She really can't see you, Mr. Crosby. Mrs. Delancy leaves at four o'clock for Chicago, where she takes the Michigan Central for New York to-night. You can gain nothing by seeing her."

"But I insist, sir," exploded Crosby.

"You may come down when you like," said Aus-

tin. "The dog will be here until I return from the depot after driving her over. Come down when you like."

Crosby did not utter the threat that surged to his lips. With the wisdom born of self-preservation, he temporized, reserving deep down in the surging young breast a promise to amply recompense his pride for the blows it was receiving at the hands of the detestable Mr. Austin.

"You'll admit that I'm in a devil of a pickle, Mr. Austin," he said jovially. "The dog is not at all friendly."

"He is at least diverting. You won't be lonesome while I'm away. I'll tell Mrs. Delancy that you called," said Austin ironically.

He turned to leave the barn, and the sinister sneer on his face gave Crosby a new and amazing inspiration. Like a flash there rushed into his mind the belief that Austin had a deep laid design in not permitting him to see the lady. With this belief also came the conviction that he was hurrying her off to New York on some pretext simply to forestall any action that might induce her to continue the contemplated suit against the estate. Mrs. Delancy had undoubtedly been urged to drop the matter under pressure of promises, and the Austins were getting her away from the scene of action before she could reconsider or before her solicitors could convince her of the mistake she was making. The thought of this sent the fire of resentment racing through Crosby's brain, and he fairly gasped with the longing to get at

the bottom of the case. His only hope now lay in sending a telegram to Mr. Rolfe, commanding him to meet Mrs. Delancy when her train reached Chicago, and to lay the whole matter before her.

Before Austin could make his exit the voices of women were heard outside the door and an instant later two ladies entered. The farmer attempted to turn them back, but the younger, taller, and slighter of the newcomers cried:

"I just couldn't go without another look at the horses, Bob."

Crosby, on the beam, did not fail to observe the rich, tender tone of the voice, and it would have required almost total darkness to obscure the beauty of her face. Her companion was older and coarser, and he found delight in the belief that she was the better half of the disagreeable Mr. Austin.

"Good-afternoon, Mrs. Delancy!" came a fine masculine voice from nowhere. The ladies started in amazement, Mr. Austin ground his teeth, the dog took another tired leap upward; Mr. Crosby took off his hat gallantly, and waited patiently for the lady to discover his whereabouts.

"Who is it, Bob?" cried the tall one, and Crosby patted his bump of shrewdness happily. "Who have you in hiding here?"

"I'm not in hiding, Mrs. Delancy. I'm a prisoner, that's all. I'm right near the top of the ladder directly in front of you. You know me only through the mails, but my partner, Mr. Rolfe, is known to you personally. My name is Crosby."

"How very strange," she cried in wonder. "Why don't you come down, Mr Crosby?"

"I hate to admit it, but I'm afraid. There's the dog, you know. Have you any influence over him?"

"None whatever. He hates me. Perhaps Mr. Austin can manage him. Oh, isn't it ludicrous?" and she burst into hearty laughter. It was a very musical laugh, but Crosby considered it a disagreeable croak.

"But Mr. Austin declines to interfere. I came to see you on private business and am not permitted to do so."

"We don't know this fellow, Louise, and I can't allow you to talk to him," said Austin brusquely. "I found him where he is and there he stays until the marshal comes out from town. His actions have been very suspicious and must be investigated. I can't take chances on letting a horse thief escape. Swallow will watch him until I can secure assistance."

"I implore you, Mrs. Delancy, to give me a moment or two in which to explain," cried Crosby. "He knows I'm not here to steal his horses, and he knows I intend to punch his head the minute I get the chance." Mrs. Austin's little shriek of dismay and her husband's fierce glare did not check the flow of language from the beam. "I *am* Crosby of Rolfe & Crosby, your counsel. I have the papers here for you to sign and——"

"Louise, I insist that you come away from here. This fellow is a fraud——"

"He's refreshing, at any rate," said Mrs. Delancy

gaily. "There can be no harm in hearing what he has to say, Bob."

"You are very kind, and I won't detain you long."

"I've a mind to kick you out of this barn," cried Austin angrily.

"I don't believe you're tall enough, my good fellow." Mr. Crosby was more than amiable. He was positively genial. Mrs. Delancy's pretty face was the picture of eager, excited mirth, and he saw that she was determined to see the comedy to the end.

"Louise!" exclaimed Mrs. Austin, speaking for the first time. "You are not fool enough to credit this fellow's story, I'm sure. Come to the house at once. I will not stay here." Mrs. Austin's voice was hard and biting, and Crosby also caught the quick glance that passed between husband and wife.

"I am sure Mrs. Delancy will not be so unkind as to leave me after I've had so much trouble in getting an audience. Here is my card, Mrs. Delancy." Crosby tossed a card from his perch, but Swallow gobbled it up instantly. Mrs. Delancy gave a little cry of disappointment, and Crosby promptly apologized for the dog's greediness. "Mr. Austin knows I'm Crosby," he concluded.

"I know nothing of the sort, sir, and I forbid Mrs. Delancy holding further conversation with you. This is an outrageous imposition, Louise. You must hurry, by the way, or we'll miss the train," said Austin, biting his lip impatiently.

"That reminds me, I also take the four o'clock train for Chicago, Mrs. Delancy. If you prefer, we

can talk over our affairs on the train instead of here. I'll confess this isn't a very dignified manner in which to hold a consultation," said Crosby apologetically.

"Will you be kind enough to state the nature of your business, Mr. Crosby?" said the young woman, ignoring Mr. Austin.

"Then you believe I'm Crosby?" cried that gentleman triumphantly.

"Louise!" cried Mrs. Austin in despair.

"In spite of your present occupation, I believe you are Crosby," said Mrs. Delancy merrily.

"But, good gracious, I can't talk business with you from this confounded beam," he cried lugubriously.

"Mr. Austin will call the dog away," she said confidently, turning to the man in the door. Austin's sallow face lighted with a sudden malicious grin, and there was positive joy in his voice.

"You may be satisfied, but I am not. If you desire to transact business with this impertinent stranger, Mrs. Delancy, you'll have to do so under existing conditions. I do not approve of him or his methods, and my dog doesn't either. You can trust a dog for knowing a man for what he is. Mrs. Austin and I are going to the house. You may remain, of course; I have no right to command you to follow. When you are ready to drive to the station, please come to the house. I'll be ready. Your Mr. Crosby may leave when he likes—if *he can*. Come, Elizabeth." With this defiant thrust, Mr. Austin stalked from the barn, followed by his wife. Mrs. Delancy

started to follow but checked herself immediately, a flush of anger mounting to her brow. After a long pause she spoke.

"I don't understand how you came to be where you are, Mr. Crosby," she said slowly. He related his experiences rapidly and laughed with her simply because she had a way with her.

"You'll pardon me for laughing," she giggled.

"With all my heart," he replied gallantly. "It must be very funny. However, this is not business. You are in a hurry to get away from here and—I'm not, it seems. Briefly, Mrs. Delancy, I have the papers you are to sign before we begin your action against the Fairwater estate. You know what they are through Mr. Rolfe."

"Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Crosby, to say to you that I have decided to abandon the matter. A satisfactory compromise is under way."

"So I've been told. But are you sure you understand yourself?"

"Perfectly, thank you."

"This is a very unsatisfactory place from which to argue my case, Mrs. Delancy. Can't you dispose of the dog?"

"Only God disposes."

"Well, do you mind telling me what the compromise provides?" She stared at him for a moment haughtily, but his smile won the point for him. She told him everything and then looked very much displeased when he swore distinctly.

"Pardon me, but you are getting very much the

worst of it in this deal. It is the most contemptible scheme to rob that I ever heard of. By this arrangement you are to get farming lands and building lots in rural towns worth in all about \$100,000, I'd say. Don't you know that you are entitled to nearly half a million?"

"Oh, dear, no. By right, my share is less than \$75,000," she cried triumphantly.

"Who told you so?" he demanded, and she saw a very heavy frown on his erstwhile merry face.

"Why—why, Mr. Austin and another brother-in-law, Mr. Gray, both of whom are very kind to me in the matter, I'm sure."

"Mrs. Delancy, you are being robbed by these fellows. Can't you see that these brothers-in-law and their wives will profit immensely if they succeed in keeping the wool over your eyes long enough? Let *me* show you some figures." He excitedly drew a packet of papers from his pocket and in five minutes' time had her gasping with the knowledge that she was legally entitled to more than half a million of dollars.

"Are you sure?" she cried, unable to believe her ears.

"Absolutely. Here is the inventory and here are the figures to corroborate everything I say."

"But *they* had figures, too," she cried in perplexity.

"Certainly. Figures are wonderful things. I only ask you to defer this plan to compromise until we are able to thoroughly convince you that I am not misrepresenting the facts to you."

"Oh, if I could only believe you!"

"I'd toss the documents down to you if I were not afraid they'd join my card. That is a terribly ravenous beast. Surely you can coax him out of the barn," he added eagerly.

"I can try, but persuasion is difficult with a bulldog, you know," she said doubtfully. "It is much easier to persuade a man," she smiled.

"I trust you won't try to persuade me to come down," he said in alarm.

"Mr. Austin is a brute to treat you in this manner," she cried indignantly.

"I wouldn't treat a dog as he is treating me."

"Oh, I am sure you couldn't," she cried in perfect sincerity. "Swallow doesn't like me, but I'll try to get him away. You can't stay up there all night."

"By Jove!" he exclaimed sharply.

"What is it?" she asked quickly.

"I had forgotten an engagement in Chicago for tonight. Box party at the comic opera," he said, looking nervously at his watch.

"It would be too bad if you missed it," she said sweetly. "You'd be much more comfortable in a box."

"You are consoling at least. Are you going to coax him off?"

"In behalf of the box party, I'll try. Come, Swallow. There's a nice doggie!"

Crosby watched the proceedings with deepest interest and concern and not a little admiration. But not only did Swallow refuse to abdicate but he seemed

to take decided exceptions to the feminine method of appeal. He evidently did not like to be called "doggie," "pet," "dearie," and all such.

"He won't come," she cried plaintively.

"I have it!" he exclaimed, his face brightening. "Will you hand me that three-tined pitchfork over there? With that in my hands I'll make Swallow see—Look out! For heaven's sake, don't go near him! He'll kill you." She had taken two or three steps toward the dog, her hand extended pleadingly, only to be met by an ominous growl, a fine display of teeth, and a bristling back. As if paralyzed, she halted at the foot of the ladder, terror suddenly taking possession of her.

"Can you get the pitchfork?"

"I am afraid to move," she moaned. "He is horrible—horrible!"

"I'll come down, Mrs. Delancy, and hang the consequences," Crosby cried, and was suiting the action to the word when she cried out in remonstrance.

"Don't come down—don't! He'll kill you. I forbid you to come down, Mr. Crosby. Look at him! Oh, he's coming toward me! Don't come down!" she shrieked. "I'll come up!"

Grasping her skirts with one hand she started frantically up the ladder, her terrified eyes looking into the face of the man above. There was a vicious snarl from the dog, a savage lunge, and then something closed over her arm like a vice. She felt herself being jerked upward and a second later she was on the beam beside the flushed young man whose strong

hand and not the dog's jaws had reached her first. He was obliged to support her for a few minutes with one of his emphatic arms, so near was she to fainting.

"Oh," she gasped at last, looking into his eyes questioningly. "Did he bite me? I was not sure, you know. He gave such an awful leap for me. How did you do it?"

"A simple twist of the wrist, as the prestidigitators say. You had a close call, my dear Mrs. Delancy." He was a-quiver with new sensations that were sending his spirits sky high. After all it was not turning out so badly.

"He would have dragged me down had it not been for you. And I might have been torn to pieces," she shuddered, glancing down at the now infuriated dog.

"It would have been appalling," he agreed, discreetly allowing her to imagine the worst.

"How can I ever thank you?" cried she impulsively. He made a very creditable show of embarrassment in the effort to convince her that he had accomplished only what any man would have attempted under similar circumstances. She was thoroughly convinced that no other man could have succeeded.

"Well, we're in a pretty position, are we not?" he asked in the end.

"I think I can stick on without being held, Mr. Crosby," she said, and his arm slowly and regretfully came to parade rest.

"Are you sure you won't get dizzy?" he demanded in deep solicitude.

"I'll not look down," she said, smiling into his eyes. He lost the power of speech for a moment. "May I look at those figures now?"

For the next ten minutes she studiously followed him as he explained the contents of the various papers. She held the sheets and they sat very close to each other on the big beam. The dog looked on in sour disgust.

"They cannot be wrong," she cried at last. Her eyes were sparkling. "You are as good as an angel."

"I only regret that I can't complete the illusion by unfolding a strong and convenient pair of wings," he said dolorously. "How are we to catch that train for Chicago?"

"I'm afraid we can't," she said demurely. "You'll miss the box party."

"That's a pleasure easily sacrificed."

"Besides, you are seeing me on business. Pleasure should never interfere with business, you know."

"It doesn't seem to," he said, and the dog saw them smile tranquilly into each other's eyes.

"Oh, isn't this too funny for words?" He looked very grateful.

"I wonder when Austin will condescend to release us."

"I have come to a decision, Mr. Crosby," she said irrelevantly.

"Indeed?"

"I shall never speak to Robert Austin again, and I'll never enter his house as long as I live," she announced determinedly.

"Good! But you forget your personal effects. They are in his house." He was overflowing with happiness.

"They have all gone to the depot and I have the baggage checks. My ticket and my money are in this purse. You see, we are quite on the same footing."

"I don't feel sure of my footing," he commented ruefully. "By the way, I have a fountain pen. Would you mind signing these papers? We'll be quite sure of our standing at least."

She deliberately spread out the papers on the beam, and, while he obligingly kept her from falling, signed seven documents in a full, decisive hand: "Louise Hampton Delancy."

"There! That means that you are to begin suit, she said finally, handing the pen to him.

"I'll not waste an instant," he said meaningly. "In fact, the suit is already under way."

"I don't understand you," she said, but she flushed.

"That's what a lawyer says when he goes to court," he explained.

"Oh," she said, thoroughly convinced.

At the end of another hour the two on the beam were looking at each other with troubled eyes. When he glanced at his watch at six o'clock, his face was extremely sober. There was a tired, wistful expression in her eyes.

"Do you think they'll keep us here all night?" she asked plaintively.

"Heaven knows what that scoundrel will do."

"We have the papers signed, at any rate." She sighed, trying to revive the dying spark of humor.

"And we won't be lonesome," he added, glaring at the dog.

"Did you ever dream that a man could be so despicable?"

"Ah, here comes some one at last," he cried, brightening up.

The figure of Robert Austin appeared in the doorway.

"Oho, you're both up there now, are you?" he snapped. "That's why you didn't go to the depot, is it? Well, how has the business progressed?"

"She has signed all the papers, if that's what you want to know," said Crosby tantalizingly.

"That's all the good it will do her. We'll beat you in court, Mr. Crosby, and we won't leave a dollar for you, my dear sister-in-law," snarled Austin, his face white with rage.

"And now that we've settled our business, and missed our train, perhaps you'll call off your confounded dog," said Crosby. Austin's face broke into a wide grin, and he chuckled aloud. Then he leaned against the door-post and held his sides.

"What's the joke?" demanded the irate Crosby. Mrs. Delancy clasped his arm and looked down upon Austin as if he had suddenly gone mad.

"You want to come down, eh?" cackled Austin. "Why don't you come down? I know you'll pardon my laughter, but I have just remembered that you may be a horse thief and that I was not going to let

you escape. Mrs. Delancy refuses to speak to me, so I decline to ask her to come down."

"Do you mean to say you'll keep this lady up here for—" began Crosby fiercely. Her hand on his arm prevented him from leaping to the floor.

"She may come down when she desires, and so may you, sir, roared Austin stormily.

"But some one will release us, curse you, and then I'll make you sorry you ever lived," hissed Crosby. "You are a black-hearted cur, a cowardly dog——"

"Don't—don't!" whispered the timid woman beside him.

"You are helping your cause beautifully," sneered Austin. "My men have instructions to stay away from the barn until the marshal comes. I, myself, expect to feed and bed the horses."

Deliberately he went about the task of feeding the horses. The two on the beam looked on in helpless silence. Crosby had murder in his heart. At last the master of the situation started for the door.

"Good-night," he said sarcastically. "Pleasant dreams."

"You brute," cried Crosby, hoarse with anger. A sob came from his tired companion and Crosby turned to her, his heart full of tenderness and—shame, perhaps. Tears were streaming down her cheeks and her shoulders drooped dejectedly.

"What shall we do?" she moaned. Crosby could frame no answer. He gently took her hand in his and held it tightly. She made no effort to withdraw it.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said softly. "Don't cry, little woman. It will all end right, I know."

Just then Austin reëntered the barn. Without a word he strode over and emptied a pan of raw meat on the floor in front of the dog. Then he calmly departed, but Crosby could have sworn he heard him chuckle. The captives looked at each other dumbly for a full minute, one with wet, wide-open, hurt eyes, the other with consternation. Gradually the sober light in their eyes faded away and feeble smiles developed into peals of laughter. The irony of the situation bore down upon them irresistibly and their genuine, healthy young minds saw the picture in all of its ludicrous colorings. Not even the prospect of a night in mid-air could conquer the wild desire to laugh.

"Isn't it too funny for words?" she laughed bravely through her tears.

Then, for some reason, both relapsed into dark, silent contemplation of the dog who was so calmly enjoying his evening repast.

"I am sorry to admit it, Mr. Crosby, but I am growing frightfully hungry," she said wistfully.

"It has just occurred to me that I haven't eaten a bite since seven o'clock this morning," he said.

"You poor man! I wish I could cook something for you."

"You might learn."

"You know what I mean," she explained reddening a bit. "You must be nearly famished."

"I prefer to think of something more interesting," he said coolly.

"It is horrid!" she sobbed. "See, it is getting dark. Night is coming. Mr. Crosby, what is to become of us?" He was very much distressed by her tears and a desperate resolve took root in his breast. She was so tired and dispirited that she seemed glad when he drew her close to him and pressed her head upon his shoulder. He heard the long sigh of relief and relaxation and she peered curiously over her wet lace handkerchief when he muttered tenderly:

"Poor little chap!"

Then she sighed again quite securely, and there was a long silence, broken regularly and rhythmically by the faint little catches that once were tearful sobs.

"Oh, dear me! It is quite dark," she cried suddenly, and he felt a shudder run through her body.

"Where could you go to-night, Mrs. Delancy, if we were to succeed in getting away from here?" he asked abruptly. She felt his figure straighten and his arm grow tense as if a sudden determination had charged through it.

"Why—why, I hadn't thought about that," she confessed, confronted by a new proposition.

"There's a late night train for Chicago," he volunteered.

"But how are we to catch it?"

"If you are willing to walk to town I think you can catch it," he said, a strange ring in his voice.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, looking up at his face quickly.

"Can you walk the two miles?" he persisted. "The train leaves Dexter at eleven o'clock and it is now nearly eight."

"Of course I can walk it," she said eagerly. "I could walk a hundred miles to get away from this place."

"You'll miss the New York train, of course."

"I've changed my mind, Mr. Crosby. I shall remain in Chicago until we have had our revenge on Austin and the others."

"That's very good of you. May I ask where you stop in Chicago?"

"My apartments are in the C—— Building. My mother lives with me."

"Will you come to see me some time?" he asked, an odd smile on his lips.

"Come to see you?" she cried in surprise. "The idea! What do you mean?"

"I may not be able to call on you for some time, but you can be very good to me by coming to see me. I'll be stopping at St. Luke's Hospital for quite a while."

"At St. Luke's Hospital? I don't understand," she cried perplexed.

"You see, my dear Mrs. Delancy, I have come to a definite conclusion in regard to our present position. You must not stay here all night. I'd be a coward and a cur to subject you to such a thing. Well, I'm going down to tackle that dog."

"To—tackle—the—dog," she gasped.

"And while I'm keeping him busy you are to cut and run for the road down there. Then you'll have easy sailing for town."

"Mr. Crosby," she said firmly, clasping his arm; "you are not to leave this beam. Do you think I'll permit you to go down there and be torn to pieces by that beast, just for the sake of letting me cut and run, as you call it? I'd be a bigger brute than the dog and—and——"

"Mrs. Delancy, my mind is made up. I'm going down!"

"That settles it! I'm coming too," she proclaimed emphatically.

"To be sure. That's the plan. You'll escape while I hold Swallow."

"I'll do nothing of the sort. You shall not sacrifice yourself for my sake. I'd stay up here with you all the rest of my life before I'd permit you to do that."

"I'll remind you of that offer later on, my dear Mrs. Delancy, when we are not so pressed for time. Just now you must be practical, however. We can't stay up here all night."

"Please, Mr. Crosby, for my sake, don't go down there. To please me, don't be disfigured. I know you are awfully brave and strong, but he is such a huge, vicious dog. Won't you please stay here?"

"Ten minutes from now it will be too dark to see the dog and he'll have an advantage over me. Listen: I'll meet you at the depot in an hour and a half.

This is final, Mrs. Delancy. Will you do as I tell you? Run for the road and then to town. I'll promise to join you there."

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" she moaned, as he drew away from her and swung one foot to the ladder. "I shall die if you go down there."

"I am going just the same. Don't be afraid, little woman. My pocket knife is open and it is a trusty blade. Now, be brave and be quick. Follow me down the ladder and cut for it."

"Please, please, please!" she implored, wringing her hands.

But he was already half-way down the ladder and refused to stop.

Suddenly Crosby paused as if checked in his progress by some insurmountable obstacle. The dog was at the foot of the ladder, snarling with joy over the prospective end of his long vigil. Above, Mrs. Delancy was moaning and imploring him to come back to her side, even threatening to spring from the beam to the floor before he could reach the bottom.

"By George!" he exclaimed, and then climbed up three or four rounds of the ladder, greatly to the annoyance of the dog.

"What is it?" cried Mrs. Delancy, recovering her balance on the beam.

"Let me think for a minute," he answered, deliberately resting his elbow on an upper round.

"It is about time you were doing a little thinking," she said, relief and asperity in her voice. "In an-

other second I should have jumped into that dog's jaws."

"I believe it can be done," he went on, excited enthusiasm growing in his voice. "That's what bulldogs are famous for, isn't it?"

"I don't know what you are talking about, but I do know that whenever they take hold of anything they have to be treated for lockjaw before they will let go. If you don't come up here beside me I'll have a fit, Mr. Crosby."

"That's it—that's what I mean," he cried eagerly. "If they close those jaws upon anything they won't let go until death them doth part. Gad, I believe I see a way out of this pickle."

"I don't see how that can help us. The dog's jaws are the one and only obstacle, and it is usually the other fellow's death that parts them. Oh," she went on, plaintively, "if we could only pull his teeth. Good heaven, Mr. Crosby," sitting up very abruptly, "you are not thinking of undertaking it, are you?"

"No, but I've got a scheme that will make Swallow ashamed of himself to the end of his days. I can't help laughing over it." He leaned back and laughed heartily. "Hold my coat, please." He removed his coat quickly and passed it up to her.

"I insist on knowing what you intend doing," she exclaimed.

"Just wait and see me show Mr. Swallow a new trick or two." He had already taken his watch and chain, his fountain pen, and other effects from his vest, jamming them into his trousers pockets. Mrs.

Delancy, in the growing darkness, looked on, puzzled and anxious.

"You might tell me," she argued resentfully. "Are you going to try to swim out?"

Folding the vest lengthwise, he took a firm grip on the collar, and cautiously descended the ladder.

"I'll not come to the hospital," she cried warningly. "Don't! he'll bite your leg off!"

"I'm merely teasing him, Mrs Delancy. He sha'n't harm my legs, don't fear. Now watch for developments." Pausing just beyond reach of the dog's mightiest leaps, he took a firm hold on the ladder and swung down with the vest until it almost slapped the head of the angry animal. It was like casting a fly directly at the head of a hungry pickerel. Swallow's eager jaws closed down upon the cloth and the teeth met like a vice. The heavy body of the brute almost jerked Crosby's arm from the socket, but he braced himself, recovered his poise, and clung gaily to the ladder, with the growling, squirming dog dangling free of the floor. Mrs. Delancy gave a little shriek of terror.

"Are you—going to bring him up here?" she gasped.

"Heaven knows where he'll end."

"But he will ruin your vest."

"I'll charge it up to your account. Item: one vest, fifteen dollars."

By this time he was swinging Swallow slowly back and forth, and he afterwards said that it required no little straining of his muscles.

"You extravagant thing!" she cried, but did not tell whether she meant his profligacy in purchasing or his wantonness in destroying. "And now, pray enlighten me. Are you swinging him just for fun or are you crazy?"

"Everything depends on his jaws and my strong right arm," he said, and he was beginning to pant from the exertion. Swallow was swinging higher and higher.

"Well, it is the most aimless proceeding I ever saw."

"I hope not. On second thought, everything depends on my aim."

"And what is your aim, Mr. Hercules?"

"See that opening above the box-stall over there?"

"Dimly."

"That's my aim. Heavens, he's a heavy brute."

"Oh, I see!" she cried ecstatically, clapping her hands. "Delicious! Lovely! Oh, Mr. Crosby, you are so clever."

"Don't fall off that beam, please," he panted. "It might rattle me."

"I can't help being excited. It is the grandest thing I ever heard of. He can't get out of there, can he? Dear me, the sides of that stall are more than eight feet high."

"He can't—get—out—of it if—I get him—in," gasped Crosby.

Not ten feet away to the left and some four feet above the floor level there was a wide opening into a box-stall, the home of Mr. Austin's prize stallion.

As the big horse was inside munching his hay, Crosby was reasonably sure that the stall with its tall sides was securely closed and bolted.

Suddenly there was a mighty creak of the ladder, the swish of a heavy body through the air, an interrupted growl, and then a ripping thud. Swallow's stubby body shot squarely through the opening, accompanied by a trusty though somewhat sadly stretched vest, and the deed was done. A cry of delight came from the beam, a shout of pride and relief from the ladder, and sounds of a terrific scramble from the stall. First there was a sickening grunt, then a surprised howl, then the banging of horse-hoofs, and at last a combination of growls and howls that proved Swallow's invasion of a hornet's nest.

"Thunderation!" came in sharp, agonized tones from the ladder.

"What is the matter?" she cried, detecting disaster in the exclamation.

"I am a—a—blooming idiot," he groaned. "I forgot to remove a roll of bills from an upper pocket in that vest!"

"Oh, is that all?" she cried, in great relief, starting down the ladder.

"All? There was at least fifty dollars in that roll," he said, from the floor, not forgetting to assist her gallantly to the bottom.

"You can add it to my bill, you know," she said sweetly.

"But it leaves me dead broke."

"You forget that I have money, Mr. Crosby.

What is mine to-night is also yours. I think we should shake hands and congratulate one another." Crosby's sunny nature lost its cloud in an instant, and the two clasped hands at the bottom of the ladder.

"I think it is time to cut and run," he said. "It's getting so beastly dark we won't be able to find the road."

"And there is no moon until midnight. But come; we are free. Let us fly the hated spot, as they say in the real novels. How good the air feels!"

She was soon leading the way swiftly toward the gate. Night had fallen so quickly that they were in utter darkness. There were lights in the windows of the house on the hill, and the escaped prisoners, with one impulse, shook their clenched hands toward them.

"I am awfully sorry, Mr. Crosby, that you have endured so much hardship in coming to see me," she went on. "I hope you haven't many such clients as I."

"One is enough, I assure you," he responded, and somehow she took it as a compliment.

"I suppose our next step is to get to the railway station," she said.

"Unless you will condescend to lead me through this assortment of plows, woodpiles, and farm-wagons, I'm inclined to think my next step will be my last. Was ever night so dark?" Her warm, strong fingers clutched his arm and then dropped to his hand. In this fashion she led him swiftly through the night, down a short embankment, and into the

gravel highway. "The way looks dark and grewsome ahead of us, Mrs. Delancy. As your lawyer, I'd advise you to turn back and find safe lodging with the enemy. It is going to storm, I'm sure."

"That's your advice as a lawyer, Mr. Crosby. Will you give me your advice as a friend?" she said lightly. Although the time had passed when her guiding hand was necessary, he still held the member in his own.

"I couldn't be so selfish," he protested, and without another word they started off down the road toward town.

"Do you suppose they are delaying the opera in Chicago until you come?" she asked.

"Poor Graves! he said he'd kill me if I didn't come," said Crosby, laughing.

"How dreadful!"

"But I'm not regretting the opera. Quiv   does not sing until to-morrow night."

"I adore Quiv  ."

"You can't possibly have an engagement for to-morrow night either," he said reflectively.

"I don't see how I could. I expected to be on a Pullman sleeper."

"I'll come for you at 8:15 then."

"You are very good, Mr. Crosby, but I have another plan."

"I beg your pardon for presuming to—" he began, and a hot flush mounted to his brow.

"You are to come at seven for dinner," she supplemented delightedly.

"What a nice place the seventh heaven is!" he cried warmly.

"Sh!" she whispered suddenly, and both stopped stock-still. "There is a man with a lantern at the lower gate. See? Over yonder."

"What of it? Who's afraid of a lantern?"

"But it is rather odd that the man should be there. Just see what he is doing with the lantern," she expostulated.

"He's putting it on the top of the gatepost, that's all."

"Well, there must be an object in that."

"I'll ask the man."

"It is foolish of me to be alarmed, Mr. Crosby, but I feel in my bones that something is going to happen."

"I agree with you, only I don't feel it in my bones. It affects my stomach. Why should we stand here and discuss a man with a lantern when both of us are starving to death by yards? We have a mile and a half walk ahead of us——"

"Look! A buggy is stopping at the gate—and there is another. What does it mean?"

Two vehicles, dimly outlined against the darkness, had drawn up at the gate, and the man with the lantern advanced to converse with the occupants.

"That you, Mr. Austin?" called a voice from the first buggy, as the lantern advanced.

"Yes. How many men have you with you?"

"Robert Austin!" gasped the fair watcher, clutching Crosby's arm.

"There are five of us, Mr. Austin. I guess we can take him all right."

Crosby started violently.

"They're after me, Mrs. Delancy," he whispered. A moment later they were off the road and in the dense shadow of the hedge.

"Is he still in the barn, Mr. Austin?" demanded the man in the buggy.

"I am positive he is. No human being could get away from that dog of mine." Crosby chuckled audibly, and Mrs. Delancy with difficulty suppressed a proud giggle.

"Well, we might as well go up and get him then. Do you think he's a desperate character?"

"I don't know anything about him, Davis. He says he is a lawyer, but his actions were so strange that I thought you'd best look into his case. A night in the jail won't hurt him, and if he can prove that he is what he says he is, let him go to-morrow. On the other hand, he may turn out to be a very important capture."

"Oh, this is rich!" whispered Crosby excitedly. "Austin is certainly doing the job up brown. But wait till he consults Swallow, the infallible; he won't be so positive." For a few minutes the party of men at the gate conversed in low tones, the listeners being able to catch but few of the words uttered.

"Please let go of my arm, Mrs. Delancy," said Crosby suddenly.

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to tell Austin what I think of him."

You don't expect me to stand by and allow a pack of jays to hunt me down as if I were Jesse James or some other desperado, do you?"

"Do you suppose they would credit your story? They will throw you into jail and there you'd stay until some one came down from Chicago to identify you."

"But a word from you would clear me," he said in surprise.

"If they pinned me down to the truth, I could only say I had never seen you until this afternoon."

"Great Scott! You know I am Crosby, don't you?"

"I am positive you are, but what would you, as a lawyer, say to me if you were cross-examining me on the witness stand? You'd ask some very embarrassing questions, and I could only say in the end that the suspected horse thief told me his name and I was goose enough to believe him. No, my dear friend, I think the safest plan is to take advantage of the few minutes' start we have and escape the law."

"You mean that I must run from these fellows as if I were really a thief?"

"Only a suspected thief, you know."

"I'd rather be arrested a dozen times than to desert you at this time."

"Oh, but I'm going with you," she said positively.

"Like a thief, too? I could not permit that, you know. Just stop and think how awkward for you it would be if we were caught flying together."

"Birds of a feather. It might have been worse if you had not disposed of Swallow."

"I must tell you what a genuine brick you are. If they overtake us it will give me the greatest delight in the world to fight the whole posse for your sake."

"After that, do you wonder I want to go with you?" she whispered, and Crosby would have fought a hundred men for her.

The marshal and his men were now following Mr. Austin and the lantern toward the barn, and the road was quite deserted. Mrs. Delancy and Crosby started off rapidly in the direction of the town. The low rumble of distant thunder came to their ears, and ever and anon the western blackness was faintly illumined by flashes of lightning. Neither of the fugitives uttered a word until they were far past the gate.

"By George, Mrs. Delancy, we are forgetting one important thing," said Crosby. They were striding along swiftly arm in arm. "They'll discover our flight, and the railway station will be just where they'll expect to find us."

"Oh, confusion! We can't go to the station, can we?"

"We can, but we'll be captured with humiliating ease."

"I know what we can do. Scott Higgins is the tenant on my farm, and he lives half a mile farther from town than Austin. We can turn back to his place, but we will have to cut across one of Mr. Austin's fields."

“Charming. We can have the satisfaction of trampling on some of Mr. Austin’s early wheat crop. Right about, face! But, incidentally, what are we to do after we get to Mr. Higgins’s?” They were now scurrying back over the ground they had just traversed.

“Oh, dear me, why should we think about troubles until we come to them?”

“I wasn’t thinking about troubles. I’m thinking about something to eat.”

“You are intensely unromantic. But Mrs. Higgins is awfully good. She will give us eggs and cakes and milk and coffee and—everything. Won’t it be jolly?”

Five minutes later they were plunging through a field of partly grown wheat, in what she averred to be the direction of the Higgins home. It was not good walking, but they were young and strong and very much interested in one another and the adventure.

“Hello, what’s this? A river?” he cried, as the swish of running waters came to his ears.

“Oh; isn’t it dreadful? I forgot this creek was here, and there is no bridge nearer than a mile. What shall we do? See there is a light in Higgins’s house over there. Isn’t it disgusting? I could sit down and cry,” she wailed. In the distance a dog was heard barking fiercely, but they did not recognize the voice of Swallow. A new trouble confronted them.

“Don’t do that,” he said resignedly. “Remember how Eliza crossed the ice with the bloodhounds in

full trail. Do you know how deep and wide the creek is? ”

“ It’s a tiny bit of a thing, but it’s wet,” she said ruefully.

“ I’ll carry you over.” And a moment later he was splashing through the shallow brook, holding the lithe, warm figure of his client high above the water. As he set her down upon the opposite bank she gave a pretty sigh of satisfaction, and naively told him that he was very strong for a man in the last stages of starvation.

Two or three noisy dogs gave them the first welcome, and Crosby sagely looked aloft for refuge. His companion quieted the dogs, however, and the advance on the squat farmhouse was made without resistance. The visitors were not long in acquainting the good-natured and astonished young farmer with the situation. Mrs. Higgins was called from her bed and in a jiffy was bustling about the kitchen, from which soon floated odors so tantalizing that the refugees could scarcely suppress the desire to rush forth and storm the good cook in her castle.

“ It’s mighty lucky you got here when you did, Mrs. Delancy,” said Higgins, peering from the window. “ Looks ’s if it might rain before long. We ain’t got much of a place here, but, if you’ll put up with it, I guess we can take keer of you over night.”

“ Oh, but we couldn’t think of it,” she protested. “ After we have had something to eat we must hurry off to the station.”

“ What station? ” asked Crosby sententiously.

"I don't know, but it wouldn't be a bit nice to spoil the adventure by stopping now."

"But we can't walk all over the State of Illinois," he cried.

"For shame! You are ready to give up the instant something to eat comes in sight. Mr. Higgins may be able to suggest something. What is the nearest——"

"I have it," interrupted Crosby. "The Wabash road runs through this neighborhood, doesn't it? Well, where is its nearest station?"

"Lonesomeville—about four miles south," said Higgins.

"Do the night trains stop there?"

"I guess you can flag 'em."

"There's an east-bound train from St. Louis about midnight, I'm quite sure."

While the fugitives were enjoying Mrs. Higgins's hastily but adorably prepared meal, the details of the second stage of the flight were perfected. Mr. Higgins gladly consented to hitch up his high-boarded farm wagon and drive them to the station on the Wabash line, and half an hour later Higgins's wagon clattered away in the night. To all appearances he was the only passenger. But seated on a soft pile of grain sacks in the rear of the wagon, completely hidden from view by the tall "side-beds," were the refugees. Mrs. Delancy insisted upon this mode of travel as a precaution against the prying eyes of persistent marshal's men. Hidden in the wagon-bed they might reasonably escape detection,

she argued, and Crosby humored her for more reasons than one. Higgins threw a huge grain tarpaulin over the wagon-bed, and they were sure to be dry in case the rainstorm came as expected. It was so dark that neither could see the face of the other. He had a longing desire to take her hand into his, but there was something in the atmosphere that warned him against such a delightful but unnecessary proceeding. Naturally, they were sitting quite close to each other; even the severe jolting of the springless wagon could not disturb the feeling of happy contentment.

"I hope it won't storm," she said nervously, as a little shudder ran through her body. The wind was now blowing quite fiercely and those long-distant rolls of thunder were taking on the sinister sound of near-by crashes. "I don't mind thunder when I'm in the house."

"And under the bed, I suppose," he laughed.

"Well, you know, lightning *could* strike this wagon," she persisted. "Oh, goodness, that was awfully close!" she cried, as a particularly loud crash came to their ears.

The wagon came to an abrupt stop, and Crosby was about to crawl forth to demand the reason when the sound of a man's voice came through the rushing wind.

"What is it?" whispered Mrs. Delancy, clutching his arm.

"Sh!" he replied. "We're held up by highwaymen, I think!"

"Oh, how lovely!" she whispered rapturously.

"How far are you goin'?" came the strange voice from the night.

"Oh, 's far ag'in as half," responded Higgins warily.

"That you, Scott?" demanded the other.

"Yep."

"Say, Scott, gimme a ride, will you? Goin' as far as Lonesomeville?"

"What you doin' out this time o' night?" demanded Higgins.

"Lookin' for a feller that tried to steal Mr. Austin's horses. We thought we had him cornered up to the place, but he got away somehow. But we'll get him. Davis has got fifty men scouring the country, I bet. I been sent on to Lonesomeville to head him off if he tries to take a train. He's a purty desperate character, they say, too, Scott. Say, gimme a lift as far as you're agoin', won't you?"

"I—I—well, I reckon so," floundered the helpless Higgins.

"Really, this is getting a bit serious," whispered Crosby to his breathless companion.

The deputy was now on the seat with Higgins, and the latter, bewildered and dismayed beyond expression, was urging his horses into their fastest trot. ,

"How far is it to Lonesomeville?" asked the deputy.

"'Bout two mile."

"It'll rain before we get there," said the other significantly.

"I'm not afeared of rain," said Higgins.

"What are you goin' over there this time o' night for?" asked the other. "You ain't got much of a load."

"I'm—I'm takin' some meat over to Mr. Talbert."

"Hams?"

"No; jest bacon," answered Scott, and his two hearers in the wagon-bed laughed silently.

"Not many people out a night like this," volunteered the deputy.

"Nope."

"That a tarpaulin you got in the back of the bed? Jest saw it by the lightnin'."

"Got the bacon kivered to keep it from gittin' wet 'n case it rains," hastily interposed Scott. He was discussing within himself the advisability of knocking the deputy from the seat and whipping the team into a gallop, leaving him behind.

"You don't mind my crawlin' under the tarpaulin if it rains, do you, Scott?"

"There ain't no—no room under it, Harry, an' I won't allow that bacon to git wet under no consideration."

A generous though nerve-racking crash of thunder changed the current of conversation. It drifted from the weather immediately, however, to a one-sided discussion of the escaped horse thief.

"I guess he's a purty slick one," they heard the deputy say. "Austin said he had him dead to rights

in his barn! That big bulldog of his had him treed on a beam, but when we got there, just after dark, the darned cuss was gone, an' the dog was trapped up in a box-stall. By thunder, it showed how desperate the feller is. He evidently come down from that beam an' jest naturally picked that turrible bulldog up by the neck an' throwed him over into the stall."

"Have you got a revolver?" asked Higgins loudly.

"Sure! You don't s'pose I'd go up against that kind of a man without a gun, do you?"

"Oh, goodness!" some one whispered in Crosby's ear.

"But he ain't armed," argued Higgins. "If he'd had a gun don't you s'pose he'd shot the dog an' got away long before he did?"

"That shows how much you know about these crooks, Higgins," said the other loftily. "He had a mighty good reason for not shooting the dog."

"What was the reason?"

"I don't know jest what it was, but any darned fool ought to see that he had a reason. Else why didn't he shoot? Course he had a reason. But the funny part of the whole thing is what has become of the woman."

"What woman?"

"That widder," responded the other, and Crosby felt her arm harden. "I never thought much o' that woman. You'd think she owned the whole town of Dexter to see her paradin' around the streets, showin'

off her city clothes, an' all such stuff. They do say she led George Delancy a devil of a life, an' it's no wonder he died."

"The wretch!" came from the rear of the wagon.

"Well, she's up and skipped out with the horse thief. Austin says she tried to protect him, and I guess they had a regular family row over the affair. She's gone an' the man's gone, an' it looks darned suspicious. He was a good-lookin' feller, Austin says, an' she's dead crazy to git another man, I've heard. Dang me, it's jest as I said to Davis: I wouldn't put it above her to take up with this good-lookin' thief an' skip off with him. Her husband's been dead more'n two year, an' she's too darned purty to stay in strict mournin' longer'n she has to——"

But just then something strong, firm, and resistless grasped his neck from behind, and, even as he opened his mouth to gasp out his surprise and alarm, a vise-like grip shut down on his thigh, and then, he was jerked backward, lifted upward, tossed outward, falling downward. The wagon clattered off in the night, and a tall man and a woman looked over the side of the wagon-bed and waited for the next flash of lightning to show them where the official gossipier had fallen. The long, blinding, flash came, and Crosby saw the man as he picked himself from the ditch at the roadside.

"Whip up, Higgins, and we'll leave him so far behind he'll never catch us," cried Crosby eagerly. The first drops of rain began to fall and Mrs. De-

lancy hurriedly crawled beneath the tarpaulin, urging him to follow at once. Another flash of lightning revealed the deputy, far back in the road waving his hands frantically.

"I'm glad his neck isn't broken. Hurry on, Mr. Higgins; it is now more urgent than ever that you save your bacon."

"'Tain't very comfortable ridin' for Mrs. Delancy," apologized Higgins, his horses in a lope.

"If the marshal asks you why you didn't stop and help his deputy, just tell him that the desperado held a pistol at your head and commanded you to drive like the devil. Holy mackerel, here comes the deluge!" An instant later he was under the tarpaulin, crouching beside his fellow fugitive. Conversation was impossible, so great was the noise of the rain-storm and the rattle of the wagon over the hard pike. He did his best to protect her from the jars and bumps incident to the leaping and jolting of the wagon, and both were filled with rejoicing when Higgins shouted "Whoa!" to the horses and brought the wild ride to an end.

"Where are we?" cried Crosby, sticking his head from beneath the tarpaulin.

"We're in the dump-shed of the grain elevator, just across the track from the depot."

"And the ride is over?"

"Yep. Did you get bumped much?"

"It was worse, a thousand times, than sitting on the beam," bemoaned a sweet, tired voice, and a moment later the two refugees stood erect in the

wagon, neither quite sure that legs so tired and stiff could serve as support.

"It was awful; wasn't it?" Crosby said, stretching himself painfully.

"Are you not drenched to the skin, Mr. Higgins?" cried Mrs. Delancy anxiously. "How selfish of us not to have thought of you before!"

"Oh, that's all right. This gum coat kept me purty dry."

He and Crosby assisted her from the wagon, and, while the former gave his attention to the wet and shivering horses, the latter took her arm and walked up and down the dark shed with her.

"I think you are regretting the impulse that urged you into this folly," he was saying.

"If you persist in accusing me of faint-heartedness, Mr. Crosby, I'll never speak to you again," she said. "I cast my lot with a desperado, as the deputy insinuated, and I am sure you have not heard me bewail my fate. Isn't it worth something to have one day and night of real adventure? My gown must be a sight, and I know my hair is just dreadful, but my heart is gayer and brighter to-night than it has been in years."

"And you don't regret anything that has happened?" he asked, pressing her arm ever so slightly.

"My only regret is that you heard what the deputy said about me. You don't believe I am like that, do you?" There was sweet womanly concern in her voice.

"I wish it were light enough to see your face,"

he answered, his lips close to her ear. "I know you are blushing, and you must be more beautiful—Oh, no, of course I don't think you are at all as he painted you," he concluded, suddenly checking himself and answering the plaintive question he had almost ignored.

"Thank you, kind sir," she said lightly, but he failed not to observe the tinge of confusion in the laugh that followed.

"If you'll watch the team, Mr. Crosby," the voice of Higgins broke in at this timely juncture, "I'll run acrost to the depot an' ast about the train."

"Much obliged, old man; much obliged," returned Crosby affably. "Are you afraid to be alone in the dark?" he asked, as Higgins rushed out into the rain. The storm had abated by this time and there was but the faintest suggestion of distant thunder and lightning, the after-fall of rain being little more than a drizzle.

"Awfully," she confessed, "but it's safer here than on the beam," she added, and his heart grew very tender as he detected the fatigue in her voice. "Anyhow, we have the papers safely signed."

"Mrs. Delancy, I—I swear that you shall never regret this day and night," he said, stopping in his walk and placing his hands on her shoulders. She caught her breath quickly. "Do you know what I mean?"

"I—I think—I'm not quite sure," she stammered.

"You will know some day," he said huskily.

When Mr. Higgins appeared at the end of the

shed, carrying a lighted lantern, he saw a tall young man and a tall young woman standing side by side, awaiting his approach with the unconcern of persons who have no interest in common.

"Ah, a lantern," cried Crosby. "Now we can see what we look like and—and who we are."

Higgins informed them that an east-bound passenger train went through in twenty minutes, stopping on the side track to allow west-bound No. 7 to pass. This train also took water near the bridge which crossed the river just west of the depot. The west-bound train was on time, the other about five minutes late. He brought the welcome news that the rain was over and that a few stars were peeping through the western sky. There was unwelcome news, however, in the statement that the mud was ankle deep from the elevator to the station platform and that the washing out of a street culvert would prevent him from using the wagon.

"I don't mind the mud," said Mrs. Delancy, very bravely indeed.

"My dear Mrs. Delancy, I can and will carry you a mile or more rather than have one atom of Lonesomeville mud bespatter those charming boots of yours," said Crosby cheerfully, and her protestations were useless against the argument of both men.

The distance was not great from the sheds to the station and was soon covered. Crosby was muddy to his knees, but his fair passenger was as dry as toast when he lowered her to the platform.

"You are every bit as strong as the hero in the

modern novel," she said gaily. "After this, I'll believe every word the author says about his stalwart, indomitable hero."

To say that Higgins was glad to be homeward bound would be putting it too mildly. The sigh of relief that came from him as he drove out of town a few minutes later was so audible that he heard it himself and smiled contentedly. If he expected to meet the unlamented Harry Brown on the home trip, he was to be agreeably disappointed. Mr. Brown was not on the roadway. He was, instead, on the depot platform at Lonesomeville, and when the west-bound express train whistled for the station he was standing grimly in front of two dumfounded young people who sat sleepily and unwarily on a baggage truck.

The feeble-eyed lantern sat on the platform near Crosby's swinging feet, and the picture that it looked upon was one suggestive of the cheap, sensational, and blood-curdling border drama. A mud-covered man stood before the trapped fugitives, a huge revolver in his hand, the muzzle of which, even though it wobbled painfully, was uncomfortably close to Mr. Crosby's nose.

"Throw up your hands!" said Brown, his hoarse voice shaking perceptibly. Crosby's hands went up instantly, for he was a man and a diplomat.

"Point it the other way!" cried the lady, with true feminine tact. "How dare you!—Oh, will it go off? Please, please put it away! We won't try to escape!"

"I'm takin' no chances on this feller," said Brown

grimly. "It won't go off, ma'am, unless he makes a move to git away."

"What do you want?" demanded Crosby indignantly. "My money? Take it, if you like, but don't be long about it."

"I'm no robber, darn you."

"Well, what in thunder do you mean then by holding me up at the point of a revolver?"

"I'm an officer of the law an' I arrest you. That's what I'm here for," said Brown.

"Arrest me?" exclaimed Crosby in great amazement. "What have I done?"

"No back talk now, young feller. You're the man we're after, an' it won't do you any good to chew the rag about it."

"If you don't turn that horrid pistol away, I'll faint," cried femininity in collapse. Crosby's arm went about her waist and she hid her terror-stricken eyes on his shoulder.

"Keep that hand up!" cried Brown threateningly.

"Don't be mean about it, old man. Can't you see that my arm is not at all dangerous?"

"I've got to search you."

"Search me? Well, I guess not. Where is your authority?"

"I'm a deputy marshal from Dexter."

"Have you been sworn in, sir?"

"Aw, that's all right now. No more rag chewin' out of you. That'll do *you*! Keep your hands up!"

"What am I charged with?"

"Attempted horse stealin', an' you know it."

"Have you a warrant? What is my name?"

"That'll do you now; that'll do you."

"See here, my fine friend, you've made a sad mistake. I'm not the man you want. I'm ready to go to jail, if you insist, but it will cost you every dollar you have in the world. I'll make you pay dearly for calling an honest man a thief, sir." Crosby's indignation was beautifully assumed and it took effect.

"Mr. Austin is the man who ordered your arrest," he explained. "I know Mrs. Delancy here all right, an' she left Austin's with you."

"What are you talking about, man? She is my cousin and drove over here this evening to see me between trains. I think you'd better lower your gun, my friend. This will go mighty hard with you."

"But——"

"He has you confused with that horse thief who said his name was Crosby, Tom," said she, pinching his arm delightedly. "He was the worst-looking brute I ever saw. I thought Mr. Austin had him so secure with the bulldog as guardian. Did he escape?"

"Yes, an' you went with him," exclaimed Brown, making a final stand. "An' I know all about how you come over here in Scott Higgins's wagon too."

"The man is crazy!" exclaimed Mrs. Delancy.

"He may have escaped from the asylum up north of here," whispered Crosby, loud enough for the deputy to hear.

"Here comes the train," cried she. "Now we can

ask the train men to disarm him and send him back to the asylum. Isn't it awful that such dangerous people can be at large?"

Brown lowered his pistol as the engine thundered past. The pilot was almost in the long bridge at the end of the depot when the train stopped to wait for the east-bound express to pass. The instant that Brown's revolver arm was lowered and his head turned with uncertainty to look at the train, Crosby's hand went to his coat pocket, and when the deputy turned toward him again he found himself looking into the shiny, glittering barrel of a pistol.

"Throw that gun away, my friend," said Crosby in a low tone, "or I'll blow your brains out."

"Great Scott!" gasped Brown.

"Throw it away!"

"Don't kill him," pleaded Mrs. Delancy. Brown's knees were shaking like leaves and his teeth chattered. His revolver sailed through the air and clattered on the brick pavement beyond the end of the platform.

"Don't shoot," he pleaded, ready to drop to his knees.

"I won't if you are good and kind and obliging," said Crosby sternly. "Turn around—face the engine. That's right. Now listen to me. I've got this pistol jammed squarely against your back, and if you make a false move—well, you won't have time to regret it. Answer my questions too. How long is that bridge?"

"I—I do—don't know—ow."

"It's rather long, isn't it?"

"With the fill and trestle it's nearly half a mile."

"What is the next stop west of here for this train?"

"Hopville, forty mile west."

"Where does the east-bound train stop next after leaving here?"

"It don't stop till it gits over in Indiana, thirty mile or more."

"I'm much obliged to you. Now walk straight ahead until you come to the blind end of the mail car."

At the front end of the mail car Crosby and his prisoner halted. Every one knows that the head end of the coach just back of the engine tender is "blind." That is, there is no door leading to the interior, and one must stand outside on the narrow platform if, perchance, he is there when the train starts. As the east-bound train pulled in from the bridge, coming to a stop on the track beyond the west-bound train, Crosby commanded his erstwhile captor to climb aboard the blind end of the mail coach.

"Geewhillikers, don't make me do that," groaned the unhappy Brown.

"Get aboard and don't argue. You can come back to-morrow, you know, and you're perfectly safe if you stay awake and don't roll off. Hurry up! If you try to jump off before you reach the bridge I'll shoot."

A moment later the train pulled into the bridge and Crosby hurried back to his anxious companion. Brown was on his way to a station forty miles west,

and he did not dare risk jumping off. By the time the train reached the far end of the bridge it was running forty miles an hour.

"Where is he?" she cried in alarm as he rushed with her across the intervening space to the coveted "east-bound."

"I'll tell you all about it when we get inside this train," he answered. "I think Brown is where he can't telegraph to head us off any place along the line, and if we once get into Indiana we are comparatively safe. Up you go!" and he lifted her up the car steps.

"Safe," she sighed, as they dropped into a seat in a coach.

"I'm ashamed to mention it, my dear accomplice, but are you quite sure you have your purse with you? With the usual luck of a common thief, I am penniless."

"Penniless because you gave your fortune to the cause of freedom," she supplemented, fumbling in her chatelaine bag for her purse. "Here it is. The contents are yours until the end of our romance."

The conductor took fare from him to Lafayette and informed the mud-covered gentleman that he could get a train from that city to Chicago at 2:30 in the morning.

"We're all right now," said Crosby after the conductor had passed on. "You are tired, little woman. Lie back and go to sleep. The rough part of the adventure is almost over." He secured a pillow for her,

and she was soon resting as comfortably as it was possible in the day coach of a passenger train.

For many minutes he sat beside her, his eyes resting on the beautiful tired face with its closed eyes, long lashes, pensive mouth, and its frame of dark hair, disarranged and wild.

"It's strange," he thought, almost aloud, "how suddenly it comes to a fellow. Twelve hours ago I was as free as a bird in the air, and now——"

Just then her eyes opened widely with a start, as if she had suddenly come from a rather terrifying dream. They looked squarely into his, and he felt so abashed that he was about to turn away when, with a little catch in her voice, she exclaimed:

"Good heavens!"

"What is it?" he cried.

"You are not married, are you?"

"NO!!!"

Like a culprit caught she blushed furiously, and her eyes wavered as the lids fell, shutting from his eager, surprised gaze the prettiest confusion in the world.

"I—It just occurred to me to ask," she murmured.

Crosby's exhilaration was so great that, after a long, hungry look at the peaceful face, he jumped up and went out into the vestibule, where he whistled with all the ardor of a school-boy. When he returned to his seat beside her she was awake, and the little look of distress left her face when he appeared, a happy smile succeeding.

"I thought you had deserted me," she said.

"Perish the thought."

"Mr. Crosby, if you had a pistol all the time we were in the barn, why did you not shoot the dog and free us hours before you did?" she asked sternly.

"I had no pistol," he grinned. From his pocket he drew a nickel-plated menthol inhaler and calmly leveled it at her head. "It looked very much like a pistol in the darkness," he said, "and it deserves a place among the cherished relics descending from our romance."

The next night two happy, contented persons sat in a brilliant Chicago theatre, and there was nothing in their appearance to indicate that the day and night before had been the most strenuous in their lives.

"This is more comfortable than a cross beam in a barn," she smiled.

"But it is more public," he responded.

Three months later—but Crosby won both suits.

THE FLYERS

THE FLYERS

CHAPTER I

THE FARAWAY CLUB

A cold, thick drizzle, blown by a biting wind that sent chills to the marrow, marred the early spring night, and kept indoors the few hardy members who had haunted the clubhouse since the season's opening a week before. Not more than a dozen loyal devotees to the sports of the open air lounged about the big clubhouse. Three or four rangy young women in sweaters and jackets strove bravely to dispel the gloom of the night as it settled down upon the growling masculine majority. The club steward hovered near, anxiously directing the movements of a silent and as yet undrilled corps of servants who flitted from group to group with decanters and checks, taking and mistaking orders with the usual abandon. A huge fireplace threw out heat sufficient to make the big lounging room comfortable. Now and then a spiteful gust of wind swept the rain against the western window-panes with a menace that set the teeth on edge.

"Rotten night," reflected the big man who monopolised the roomiest chair and the best position in front of the blazing logs. "Going to town to-night?" The question was general: there were half a dozen answers. Every one was going in by the last express. All of them had dined well: they had been hungry and the club was a wealthy one; even the most exclusive of appetites could be entertained at the Faraway Country Club. The last 'bus was to leave the clubhouse at ten minutes past ten, and it was then half-past eight. Ten minutes' drive from the clubhouse on the edge of the little town to the railway station—then thirty minutes to the heart of the big city in which the members lived and died at great risk to themselves.

Each succeeding spring saw the formal opening of the Faraway Country Club. The boards were pulled down from the windows and the door hinges were oiled properly after a winter of discontent. May saw the reopening, but it was not until June that crowds began to fill the house and grounds. Only the more restless and hardy had the temerity to test the pleasures of the raw spring days and nights. The M. F. H. was a loyal, eager chap; he knew what was required of him in his official capacity. With the first symptoms of softening soil he led his followers through field and wood, promising the "real hunt" inside of a month. Following a pack of overfed hounds was what every one at Faraway Club called a "real hunt."

The night so meagrely described at the beginning

of this tale followed hard upon a grey, chill day. A few golfers had spent the afternoon upon the course, inanely cursing the temporary tees and greens. A couple of polo enthusiasts tried out their ponies, and several men and women took their hunters over the course, that fairly bristled with spectres of last year's anise-seed. Now they were comfortably ensconced in the clubhouse, berating the unfortunate elements, and waiting for the last express with a persistency which allowed three or four earlier trains to come and go unnoticed. The cheerful highball was coming into its own. A stern winter of bridge had not killed the ardour of certain worshippers; continuous criticism of play arose from the table in the corner where two men and two women were engaged with the cards.

The perennial bore, who noses into everything in order to sniff his own wit, sauntered amiably from group to group, pouring out jests as murky as the night itself. He saw none of the scowls nor heard the toe-taps; he went blithely along his bridgeless way.

"I say, Brown, I saw your wife on the street yesterday, but she didn't see me," he observed to the *blasé*-looking man in corduroys.

"Ya-as," returned the other, calmly staring past him; "so she told me last night." The bore and his blissful smile passed on to the next group. There, two or three women were chatting with as many men, yawning and puffing at their cigarettes, bored by the *risque* stories the men were telling, but smiling as

though they had not already heard them from other men. Occasional remarks, dropped softly into the ears of the women, may have brought faint blushes to their cheeks, but the firelight was a fickle consort to such changes. The sly turn of a sentence gave many a double meaning; the subtle glance of the eye intended no harm. Dobson's new toast to "fair women" earned a roar of laughter, but afterwards Dobson was called to account by a husband who realised. A man over in the corner was thumping aimlessly on the piano; a golf fanatic was vigorously contending that he had driven 243 yards against the wind; a tennis enthusiast was lamenting the fact that the courts were too soft to be used; there was a certain odour of rain-soaked clothes in the huge room, ascendant even above the smell of cigarettes. Altogether, it was a night that owed much to the weather.

Mrs. Scudaway, dashing horsewoman and exponent of the free rein, was repeating the latest story concerning an intimate friend of every one present—and, consequently, absent.

"She's just sailed for Europe, and that good-looking actor friend of the family happened to go on the same steamer," she was saying with a joyous smile.

"Accidents will happen," remarked some one, benevolently.

"Where's her husband? I haven't seen him with her in months," came from one of the men.

"Oh, they have two children, you know," explained Mrs. Scudaway.

"Delicate, I hear," said Miss Ratliff.

"Naturally; he nurses them," said Mrs. Scudaway, blowing smoke half-way across the room through her delicate nostrils.

"I say, Mrs. Scudaway," cried the rapt bore, "don't you ever do anything but inhale?"

"Yes, I exhale occasionally. No, thanks," as he held forth an ash tray. Then she flicked the ashes into the fireplace, ten feet away.

"Good Lord, it's a rotten night!" repeated the big man, returning dismally from a visit to the window. "There's a beastly fog mixed in with the rain."

"Better blow the fog horn for Henderson," said Ratliff, with a jerk of his thumb. "He's half seas over already and shipping a lot of water." Henderson, the convivial member, was on his third siphon.

"I don't care a whoop what McAlpine says," roared an irascible gentleman on the opposite side of the fireplace; "a man ought to use a midiron when he gets that kind of a lie. Nobody but an ass would take a brassie. He's—"

"Just listen to that blethering idiot," said young Rolfe to the lady beside him. "He ought to be choked."

"I like the way you speak of my husband," she responded gaily.

"Oh, I forgot. He is your husband, isn't he?" Then, after a moment's easy contemplation of the pretty young woman and a scornful glance at the golfer: "Lucky, but a very poor watchdog."

"He barks beautifully," resented the young wife, with a loyal grimace.

"That's why you're not afraid of him," he said quickly.

"Don't you think he'd bite?"

"They never do."

"Well, you just try him, that's all," remarked the young wife coldly, rising and moving away, a touch of red in her cheeks.

"I will," he sang out genially, as he crossed his legs and stretched his feet out to the fire. She looked back with a mirthless smile on her lips.

The man at the piano struck up the insidious "La Matichiche," suggestive of the Bal Tabarin and other Fourteenth of July devotions.

"Don't play that, Barkley," complained the big man, as every one began beating time to the fascinating air. "I'm trying to forget Paris."

"Can you ever forget that night in Maxim's—" began Mrs. Scudaway.

"I recall the next day more vividly," he interrupted.

"Changing the subject," inserted the amiable bore, his moon-face beaming, "I see that the Thursdales have opened their place across the ravine. Isn't it rather early for them to leave town for the summer?"

"They come out every year about this time."

"Lot of people will be opening their places next week. I saw Mrs. Gorgus today. She says they're putting her house in shape—"

"Impossible!" cried Mrs. Tanner. "It hasn't any shape."

"The only thing that could put the Gorgus house in shape is an earthquake. Who was the architect of that abortion?" demanded Rolfe.

"Denison. He's an impressionist."

"The Thursdales have a new French car. Have you seen it? Eleanor ran over here in it this afternoon with her Englishman. Showing off both of her novelties at once, d'ye see?" said Carter, the tennis player.

"I understand the thing's a go—sure go," said the big man. "In the fall some time. He's a rather decent chap, too."

"And, what's better, if his brother and his cousin should happen to die, he'll be a duke."

"If they're as healthy as he seems to be, there'll be nothing doing for him."

A good-looking young fellow, who had been staring at the fire all evening, moved uneasily in his lounging chair. Several quick glances were sent to where he sat moodily apart from the others, and then surreptitious winks and nudges were exchanged.

"Joe is as crazy in love with her as ever, poor devil," whispered Rolfe. Gradually the group of gossips came closer together over the table top; the conversation was continued in more subdued tones.

"They're discussing me, damn 'em," said the moody young man to himself. "I suppose they're pitying me. Damn cats! But I'll show 'em a thing or two they're not looking for before long." He

looked at his watch for the twentieth time in an hour and scowled at the drenched window-panes across the way. For some reason this exceedingly nice-looking young man was in a state of extreme nervousness, a condition which, luckily for him, he was able to keep within himself.

And this was what Mrs. Scudaway was saying in an urgent undertone to the half dozen who leaned across the big table: "Joe is a mighty good sort, and I'm sorry for him. He's been good enough for Eleanor Thursdale ever since she came out two years ago, and I don't see why he should cease being good enough for her now. This Englishman hasn't any more money and he isn't half as good looking. He's English, that's all. Her mother's crazy to have a look in at some of those London functions she's read so much about. She's an awful ass, don't you think, Tommy?"

"Ya-as," said the *blasé* man; "such as she is."

"Mighty hard lines, this thing of being an ordinary American," lamented the placid bore.

"One might just as well be called Abraham or Isaac," reflected Carter.

"No romantic young lover would live through the first chapter with either of those names," said pretty Miss Ratliff, who read every novel that came out.

"Dauntless has been terribly out of humour for the past week or two," said Carter. "He's horribly cut up over the affair,—grouchy as blazes, and flocks by himself all the time. That's not like him, either."

"He's the sweetest boy I know," commented little

Mrs. Tanner, whose husband had barked about the midiron.

"I've heard he's the only man you ever really loved," murmured Rolfe, close to her ear.

"Nonsense! I've known him all my life," she replied, with quick and suspicious resentment.

"Trite phrase," scoffed he. "I'll wager my head that every woman living has uttered that same worn expression a hundred times. 'Known him all my life!' Ha, ha! It's a stock apology, my dear. Women, good and bad, trade under that flag. Please, to oblige me, get a fresh excuse."

"The most ignorant duffer in the world could lay you a stymie if—" the loud-voiced golfer was complaining just at that instant. The man he was addressing was nodding his head politely and at the same time trying to hear what was being said at the round table.

"Joe Dauntless is good enough for anybody's daughter," vouchsafed the *blasé* man in corduroys.

"He's a ripping good fellow," again said Mrs. Scudaway.

"Mrs. Thursdale's got an English governess for her kids, an English butler, an English bull terrier, and a new Cobden-Sanderson binding on that antique History of England she talks so much about," observed Carter.

"And she's beginning to wear her evening gowns on the street in the morning. Besides, her shoes lob over at the heels," remarked the rangy Mrs. Carter.

"Yes, she's getting to be thoroughly English. I've

noticed a tendency to chirp like a bird when she talks, too."

"That governess is a mighty stunning girl, by the way," said Rolfe.

"She's been over here a year, you know," said Mrs. Scudaway, with no apparent relevancy.

"Have you heard when Eleanor's engagement is to be announced?" asked Miss Ratliff.

"I'm not supposed to tell, but I have it on the best authority that it will be announced next week, and the wedding will take place in November. I suppose they'll ask Joe Dauntless to be an usher," said Mrs. Carter.

"Hello! Joe's gone outside. He must have heard something we said," said Rolfe, setting his highball glass down with a thump.

"Oh, if he had only been educated at Cambridge instead of in Cambridge," mourned Mrs. Carter.

It was true that the tall, good-looking Mr. Dauntless had left the room, but not because he had heard the comments of his friends. He was standing on the windswept verandah, peering through the mist toward a distant splash of light across the ravine to the right of the club grounds. The fog and mist combined to run the many lights of the Thursdale windows into a single smear of colour a few shades brighter than the darkness from which it protruded. Dauntless's heart was inside that vague, impressionistic circle of colour, but his brain was very much in evidence on the distant outside. What were the workings of that eager brain will soon be revealed—

to the reader, at least, if not to the occupants of the rain-bound clubhouse.

A word concerning Dauntless. He was the good-looking son of old banker Dauntless, who died immediately after his cashier brought ruin to the concern of which he was president. This blow fell when his son was in his senior year at Harvard. He took his degree, and then, instead of the promised trip around the world, he came home and went to work in the offices of a big brokerage firm. Everybody knew and liked him. He was a steady, earnest worker, and likewise a sportsman of the right temperament. Big, fashionable Faraway looked upon him as its most gallant member; no one cared to remember that he might have been very rich; every one loved him because he had been rich and was worthy in spite of that. It was common knowledge that he was desperately in love with pretty Eleanor Thursdale, daughter of the eminently fashionable and snobbishly aristocratic widow Thursdale, mistress of many millions and leader of select hundreds. Moreover, it was now pretty well known that Mrs. Thursdale had utterly lost sight of Dauntless in surveying the field of desirable husbands for Eleanor. She could see nothing but Englishmen, behind whom lurked the historic London drawing-rooms and British estates. That is how and why young Windomshire, a most delightful Londoner, with prospects and a peerage behind him, came to be a guest in her city house, following close upon a long sojourn in the Bermudas. *He* had been chosen; the battle was over,

so far as Eleanor's hand was concerned. What matter if Dauntless had her heart?

The object of this indifference and scorn gazed long and hard at the blob of light across the ravine. His heart was beating fast, and his body tingled with a strange excitement, which made itself manifest in a mixture of impatient frowns and prophetic smiles.

"If it wasn't such a beastly night," he was muttering in one breath, and, "Still, it's just the sort of a night we want," in the next. He was looking at his watch in the light from the window when an automobile whizzed up the wet gravel drive and came to a stop in front of the club steps. As Dauntless re-entered the house from the verandah, a tall young man in a motor coat and goggles came in through the opposite door. They paused and looked steadily at each other, then nodded briefly. The crowd of loungers glanced at the two men with instant curiosity and then breathed easily. The man who was going to marry Miss Thursdale and the man who wanted to marry her were advancing to shake hands—a trifle awkwardly, perhaps, but more or less frankly.

"Rough weather for motoring," remarked Dauntless, nervously. Windomshire removed his cap and goggles.

"Beastly. I just ran over for something to warm the inside man. Won't you join me?" His voice was pleasant to the ear, his manner easy and appealing. He was not so good looking as Dauntless, true, but he had the air of a thoroughbred in his make-up—from head to foot.

"Sit down here," called Mrs. Scudaway readily, creating a general shift of chairs. The two men hesitated a moment, nervousness apparent in both, and then sat down quickly. The Englishman was next Mrs. Scudaway. "What were you doing out in the rain?" she asked after the order for drinks had been taken.

"Hurrying to get out of it," he said with evasive good humour, "and thinking how much nicer your fogs are than ours," he added quickly.

"Anybody come over with you?" asked the bore, agreeably.

"No, they're playing bridge over at Mrs. Thursdale's and that lets me out. Beastly headache, too. Got out for a breath of air." The silence that followed this observation seemed to call for further explanations. "Miss Thursdale retired soon after dinner, wretchedly under the weather. That rather left me adrift, don't you know. I'm not playing bridge this year."

"You're not? Why not, pray?"

"Chiefly because of last year. My Mercedes came on from New York yesterday and I got her out for a spin. Couldn't resist, don't you know. She's working beautifully."

"There's one thing about a Mercedes that I don't like—and you don't find it in a Panhard. I've got a Panhard and—" Dobson was saying with all the arrogance of a motor fiend, when Mrs. Scudaway ruthlessly and properly cut him off.

"We know all about your Panhard, Dobby.

Don't bother. Is Eleanor really ill, Mr. Windomshire?"

"I had it from her own lips, Mrs. Scudaway."

"Oh, you know what I mean. Is it likely to be serious?"

"Really, I can't say. I offered to go and fetch the doctor in my car, but she assured me she'd be all right in the morning. What say, Mr. Dauntless?"

"I didn't speak, Mr. Windomshire."

"I thought you did." More than one at the table had heard Joe's involuntary chuckle.

"I say, Windomshire, what's the name of that pretty governess over at Thursdale's?" asked the busy bore. "Saw her this morning."

The Englishman looked down and flicked the ashes from his cigarette before answering.

"Miss Courtenay," he responded.

"She's a corking pretty girl." Windomshire went through the unnecessary act of flicking ashes again, but said nothing in reply. "Are there any more at home like her?" with a fine chuckle in behalf of his wit.

"She's of a very good family, I believe," said Windomshire, looking about helplessly. Mrs. Scudaway caught the look in his eyes and remembered that English gentlemen are not supposed to discuss women outside of their own set.

"It must be time for the 'bus," she said. "We're all going in by the 10.10, Mr. Windomshire."

"Can't I take some of you over to the station in my car?"

"The 'bus is dryer, I think, thank you." She led the way, and the other women followed her upstairs. "We'll be down in time," she called.

"I'll take some of you men over in Hardy's machine," volunteered Dauntless. "I've got it out here this week, while he's east."

"Ain't you going in, Joe?" demanded Rolfe.

"Not to-night. I'm staying overnight with my uncle in Cobberly Road."

"The 'bus is good enough for me. I haven't forgotten how you ran off the Peters Bridge last fall," said Carter.

"Hang it, man, he wasn't thinking about bridges that time," said the cheerful bore. "There was a girl with him. Elea— Ahem! I say, old man, what the devil time is it? Time for the confounded 'bus? Don't want to miss the train." He had caught the scowl of warning from Carter and, for a wonder, understood.

"By the way," said Windomshire, irrelevantly, "what was the disturbance over in O'Brien's Lane this morning? Anybody hurt? I was driving the car up Andrews' Hill when I saw the excitement. Couldn't make it out. Were all of the horses running away?"

"Running away!" roared the *blasé* man, forgetting his pose for the first time. "Running away!" and he broke into a roar of laughter. "Why, that was the advance guard of the Faraway Country Club. Good Lord, did you see them coming in?"

“My word, they were coming in. But what was the rush? I came over to-night to see if any of the women had been hurt. I could have sworn the horses were absolutely unmanageable. They were tearing through bushes and taking fences they’d never seen before. Egad, I give you my word, one of the women took the fence at the south end of the golf course, and she didn’t turn out for the bunker at No. 7, either. She took it like a bird, and straight across the course she flew on a dead line for the home green. What the deuce—”

“Sh! Windomshire, it will cost you your life if she hears you. That was Mrs. Scudaway. You don’t know what happened, so I’ll tell you. Half a dozen of the women went out with us for a run over the usual course. They are among our best and oldest hunters, too. Well, they were keeping right up with the men and having a splendid hunt, when all of a sudden a real, live fox dashed into view. By gad, sir, he started a panic. They’d never seen one in their lives, and they set up a howl that went clear to heaven. And they started for home—well, you saw ’em on the stretch. It was great! There never has been such riding in America. Mrs. Hooper lost her hat in the woods, and Mrs. Graves lost part of her habit coming through that break in the hedge over there. That skinny Miss Elperson, who never before has had nerve enough to jump her horse over the lawn hose, cleared the wall that runs along O’Brien’s mill, —nobody’s ever done it before,—and she came in hanging to the horse’s mane and yelling like a wild-

cat. Gad, it was two hours before we got 'em quiet and sent 'em to town. They thought it was a tiger, I understand, although some of them held out for the lion and the hyena. Mrs. Scudaway was game enough to stay and enjoy the laugh."

"What became of the fox?" demanded the Englishman, his eyes glistening. At that moment the women came trooping down stairs; the 'bus bell was clanging sleepily.

"The fox? Oh—er—hanged if I know. I—er—"

"Were you riding?"

"Well—er—just a practice run, you know, old man. Er—I say, ladies, the 'bus waits!"

Two minutes later the 'bus rolled away in the fog and drizzle, leaving Dauntless and Windomshire alone on the steps.

"Good-night," said the Englishman, after an awkward silence.

"Good-night," was the response. Then, following a brief pause, both started toward their cars. The next minute they were chugging away in the night and the lights in the clubhouse began to go out.

Two hours later a stealthy figure crept across the Thursdale lawn, lurking behind the rose beds and lilac bushes, finally worming its way to a dripping but secluded spot under the weather side of the house. It was past twelve o'clock, but there were still lights in the front part of the big summer-house. Quiet reigned there, however; the noise of merry-making came from the servants' quarters overlooking the

ravine. A handful of gravel left an impatient hand and rattled against the second-story window above. Almost instantaneously the window was raised and a head came forth.

"Joe?" came a shrill whisper from above.

"What's the matter?" whispered the man below. "I've been waiting out there for two hours—well, half an hour, at least. Aren't you coming, dear?"

"I can't get out," came in a whispered wail. "I've had my hat on for hours, but—"

"Why can't you get out? Good Lord, you just must!"

"They're playing bridge in the front part of the house and the servants are having a reunion in the back. Oh, I've been nearly crazy. What are we to do? Shall I jump?"

"Don't! Is there no way to sneak out?"

"I'm afraid of being seen. It would give everything away if any one saw me in this automobile rigging at this time of night—and in a rain like this, too. Oh, dear, dear, I know I shall go mad! You poor darling, aren't you wet to the skin? I really couldn't help it. I just couldn't be there at 11.30."

"We'll never make that train—never in the world," groaned Dauntless. "It's ten miles, and the road's horrible all the way. By Jove, Nell, you must get out some way. It's now or never. I've got everything fixed."

"Oh, Joe—listen! Do you think you can get a ladder out from under the verandah? The painters left them there this morning. Look out for paint,

dear. Don't make a noise—not a sound. Mr. Windomshire's room is just over the *porte cochère*. For Heaven's sake, don't arouse him."

"Drop your bag down first, dear,—here! I'll catch it."

"I've got to put some things in it first. It isn't quite ready," she gasped, darting away from the window.

"'Twas ever thus," he muttered in despair. Cautiously he made his way to the end of the verandah. A close listener might have heard him snarl "damn" more than once as he tugged away at the painters' ladders, which had been left there when the rain began. He was a good-natured chap, but barking his knuckles, bumping his head, and banging his shins, added to the misfortunes that had gone before, were enough to demoralise a saint. He imagined that he was making enough noise to rouse the neighbours for blocks around. No time was to be lost in self-com-miseration, however. He hurriedly dragged out a ladder, which he managed to place against the window-sill without accident.

"Here it is," she whispered excitedly. The next instant a heavy object dropped at his feet with a crash. "Oh!" she exclaimed with horror, "my perfume bottles!"

"Good Lord!" he gasped.

"I thought you were going to catch it. Oh, here's the ladder. Do you think I'll fall? Oh, oh!"

"Don't be afraid. Climb out, dear—and hurry!"

She was brave enough in the crisis. While he held

the bottom of the ladder she scrambled through the window and hurried downward. Before she reached the bottom he lifted her from the ladder in his strong arms and held her close for a moment.

"Take the ladder down, dearest," she whispered between kisses. "I don't want mother to know I left that way—not just yet,—nor Mr. Windomshire, either."

"Come this way," he whispered, after replacing the ladder. "I left the car just around the corner. Come on, darling, and we'll soon be safe. Don't make a noise!"

"Goodness, isn't it dark! What a horrid night! Oh, what's that?"

"Gad, I thought I heard something over there in the croquet ground. Sounded like some one mixing it up with a wicket. Quick! Out this way!" He had her hand in his, and was rushing ruthlessly through flower-beds toward the big gate, her travelling bag banging against his knee with the insistence of a hundredweight.

Panting and gasping for breath, they finally floundered into the roadway, and dashed off through the muddy surface toward the unseen automobile.

She was half fainting with the panic of excitement as he started to lift her into the tonneau of the car. "No, no! Please let me sit with you in the front seat," she implored. She had her way, and a moment later he was up beside her, both wrapped in the oil-cloths, the drizzle blowing in their hot faces.

"We're off, thank God!" he whispered joyously, as the car leaped forward under his hand.

"I wonder—oh, dear, how I wonder what mamma will say," she was crying in his ear.

Dauntless grinned happily as the car shot onward through the blackness of the night. Its lanterns were dark and cold, but he knew the road.

CHAPTER II

THE FLYERS CATCH THE FLYER

No one would have recognized either of them had it been possible to see them, so carefully were their heads swathed in their coverings. She was veiled and he was goggled, and both of them scrooged down in the seat apprehensively. Hardy's car, borrowed in reality for the occasion, was performing nobly. It careened through the muddy streets of the village with a sturdiness that augured well for the enterprise. Out into the country road, scudding northward, it sped. Dauntless increased the speed, not to the limit, on account of the fog and uncertainty of the road, but enough to add new thrills to the girl who crouched beside him. Neither spoke until they were far from the town line; the strain was too intense.

"What will everybody say?" she finally cried in his ear—the most natural question in the world. "And the newspapers? Oh, dear!"

"You're not weakening, are you?" he cried. "Shall I turn back?"

She was silent for half a mile.

"No," she replied at last, "I couldn't climb *up* that ladder. And besides—" with a gasp as the car

shot over the railroad tracks,—“we never could get as good a start as this again.”

“Bully for you!” he shouted.

“How far is it to Fenlock, Joe?” she asked, a quaver in her high-pitched voice.

“About seven miles. We’ll take the short cut through O’Brien’s Lane and strike Cobberly Road again at the crossroads. Then it will be easy going. We’ll catch the flyer all right, Nell. Everything’s arranged. You go into Car 5 and I in Car 7—”

“With a whole car between us? Heavens!”

“It’s safest, dear. There might happen to be some one on board who’d know us and suspect. Keep your veil down until you get into the berth. There’s not much danger of any one being up at this time of night, but don’t take any chances.”

“Goodness, isn’t it thrilling! And when do we get to Omegon?”

“Little after seven in the morning. My cousin will meet us in a hack and drive us straight to the church. His wife will go with us as the extra witness. By eight o’clock we’ll be married. Derby will be on the train with us. He’s a full-fledged preacher now, and he’ll marry us without a whimper.”

“Oh,” she sighed deliciously, in spite of the jarring of the motor, “isn’t it nice to have old college chums who can be depended upon?”

“Poor old Windomshire,” he laughed in the buoyancy of conquest.

“I don’t think he’ll—” She stopped.

“What?”

"Care very much," she concluded. He laughed doubtfully.

Mile after mile the car traversed the misty night, jolting over the ruts in the lane, taking the hills blindly—driven entirely by the hand of Good Luck.

Suddenly the "honk, honk!" of an invisible motor struck upon their tense ears, the sound coming from some point ahead in the black, narrow lane. Dauntless sat straight and peered ahead, sounding his horn sharply.

"I hope no one is coming toward us," he groaned, slowing up sharply. "We never can pass in this confounded lane. If we get off into the soft ground—Hello! Here he comes—and no lights either! Hey! Look out!" He brought his car to an abrupt standstill.

"Where are we, Joe?" she cried.

"Near the crossroads, I'm sure. Curse an idiot that runs around without lights on a night like this," he growled, forgetting that his own lamps were dark.

Out of the misty blackness loomed another car, directly ahead. It had come to a sudden stop not ten feet away. Both cars were tooting their horns viciously.

"Where are your lights?" roared Dauntless.

"Where are yours?" came back angrily through the fog.

"Good Lord!" gasped Joe, panic-stricken.

"It's Mr. Windomshire," whispered Eleanor, in consternation.

Before she realised what was happening her companion lifted her bodily over the back of the seat and deposited her in the bed of the tonneau.

"Hide, dearest," he whispered. "Get under the storm blankets. He must not see you! I'll—I'll bluff it out some way."

"Wha—what is he doing out here in a machine?" she was whispering wildly. "He is pursuing us! He has found out!"

In the other car Windomshire—for it was the tall Englishman—was hoarsely whispering to some one beside him:

"It's Dauntless! Hang him! What's he doing here?" Then followed a hurried scuffling and subdued whispers. A long silence, fraught with an importance which the throbbing of the two engines was powerless to disturb, followed the mutual discovery. Joe's brain worked the quicker. Disguising his voice as best he could, he shouted through the fog:

"We can't pass here."

"Is—is this Cobberly Road?" cried Windomshire, striving to obtain what he considered the American twang.

"No, it's not. It's O'Brien's Lane." Then, after a long silence, "Can't you back out?"

"It's rather—I mean sorter risky, mister. I don't know how far I'd have to back, doncherknow—er, ahem!"

"The crossroads can't be more than a hundred yards behind you. Where are you going?"

"I'm going for—a doctor," called Windomshire, hastily.

"Well, then, we ought not to stand here all night," groaned Joe, his ears open to catch the sound of the locomotive's whistle. There was no time to be lost.

"I'll—I'll try to back her out," shouted Windomshire. Eleanor whispered something shrilly and anxiously from the tonneau, and Joe called out instantly:

"Who is ill?"

"Mrs.—Mrs. Smith," replied the other, bravely.

"Good!" exclaimed Dauntless, heartily. Windomshire was not in the least annoyed by the lack of sympathy. He began to drive his car backward by jerks and jolts, blindly trusting to luck in the effort to reach the road which he had passed in his haste a few minutes before. Joe was shouting encouragement and pushing slowly forward in his own machine. The noise of the engines was deafening.

"Hang it all, man, don't blow your horn like that!" roared Windomshire at last, harassed and full of dread. Joe, in his abstraction, was sounding his siren in a most insulting manner.

At last Windomshire's wheels struck a surface that seemed hard and resisting. He gave a shout of joy.

"Here we are! It's macadam!"

"Cobberly Road," cried Joe. "Back off to the right and let me run in ahead. I'm—I'm in a devil of a hurry."

"By Gad, sir, so am I. Hi, hold back there! Look out where you're going, confound you!"

"Now for it," cried Joe to Eleanor. "We've got

the lead; I'll bet a bun he can't catch us." He had deliberately driven across the other's bows, as it were, scraping the wheel, and was off over Cobberly Road like the wind. "Turn to your right at the next crossing," he shouted back to Windomshire. Then to himself hopefully: "If he does that, he'll miss Fenlock by three miles."

They had covered two rash, terrifying miles before a word was spoken. Then he heard her voice in his ear—an anxious, troubled voice that could scarcely be heard above the rushing wind.

"What will we do if the train is late, dear? He'll be—be sure to catch us."

"She's never late. Besides, what if he does catch us? We don't have to go back, do we? You're of age. Brace up; be a man!" he called back encouragingly.

"There are too many men as it is," she wailed, sinking back into the tonneau.

"Here we are!" he shouted, as the car whizzed into a murky, dimly lighted street on the edge of Fenlock, the county seat. "There are the station lights just ahead."

"Is the train in?" she cried, struggling to her feet eagerly.

"I think not." He was slowing down. A moment later the throbbing car came to a stop beside the railway station platform. The lights blinked feebly through the mist; far off in the night arose the faint toot of a locomotive's whistle.

"We're just in time," he cried. "She's coming."

Quick!" He lifted her bodily over the side of the car, jerked two suitcases from beneath the curtains, and rushed frantically to the shelter of the platform sheds.

"I'll leave you here, dear," he was saying rapidly. "Wait a second; there is your railroad ticket and your drawing-room ticket, too. I'll wake Derby when I get on board. I have to run the automobile down to Henry's garage first. Won't take ten seconds. Don't worry. The train won't be here for three or four minutes. Get on board and go to sleep. I'll be two cars ahead."

"Oh, Joe, won't I see you again before we start?" she cried despairingly.

"I'll be back in a minute. It's only half a block to Henry's. All I have to do is to leave the car in front of his place. His men will look after it. It's all understood, dearest; don't worry. I'll be here before the train, never fear. Stand here in the shadow, dear." He gave her what might have been a passionate kiss had it not been for the intervention of veil and goggles. Then he was off to the motor, his heart thumping frantically. Standing as stiff and motionless as a statue against the damp brick wall, she heard the automobile leap away and go pounding down the street. Apparently she was alone on the platform; the ticking of telegraph instruments came to her anxious ears, however, and she knew there were living people inside the long, low building. The experience certainly was new to this tall, carefully nurtured girl. Never before had she been left alone at such an hour

and place; it goes without saying that the circumstances were unique. Here she was, standing alone in the most wretched of nights, her heart throbbing with a dozen emotions, her eyes and ears labouring in a new and thrilling enterprise, her whole life poised on the social dividing line. She was running away to marry the man she had loved for years; slipping away from the knot that ambition was trying to throw over her rebellious head. If she had any thought of the past or the future, however, it was lost among the fears and anxieties of the present. Her soul was crying out for the approach of two objects—Joe Dauntless and the north-bound flyer.

Her sharp ears caught the sound which told her that the motor had stopped down the street; it was a welcome sound, for it meant that he was racing back to the station—and just in time, too; the flyer was pounding the rails less than half a mile away.

Fenlock was a division point in the railroad. The company's yards and the train despatcher's office were located there. A huge round-house stood off to the right; half a dozen big headlights glared out at the shivering Eleanor like so many spying, accusing eyes. She knew that all trains stopped in Fenlock. Joe had told her that the flyer's pause was the briefest of any during the day or night; still she wondered if it would go thundering through and spoil everything.

Miss Thursdale, watching the approaching headlight, her ears filled with the din of the wheels, did not see or hear a second motor car rush up to the extreme

south end of the platform. She was not thinking of Windomshire or his machine. That is why she failed to witness an extraordinary incident.

As the driver leaped from the car a second man disconnected himself from the shadows, paused for a moment to take orders from the new arrival, and then jumped into the seat just vacated. Whereupon the one-time driver performed precisely the same feat that Dauntless had performed three minutes before him. He jerked forth a couple of bags and then proceeded to lift from the tonneau of the car a vague but animate something, which, an instant later, resolved itself into the form of a woman at his side.

"I've settled with the company, Meaders," hurriedly announced Windomshire to the man on the seat. "The car is in your hands now."

"Yes, sir; I understand. Your week is up to-night. Hope it was satisfactory, sir." The car shot off in the night, almost running down a man who scudded across the street in its path.

"Just in time, Anne," said Windomshire to the tall, hooded figure beside him. "Thank God, we didn't miss it."

"Hasn't it been good sport, Harry?" cried the young woman, with an unmistakably English inflection. "It's just like a book."

"Only more so," he observed. "This has really happened, you know. Things never really happen in books, don't you know. You've not lost your tickets, dear?"

"No; they do that only in books. Really, I'm

trembling like a leaf. I can't realise that it is all taking place as we planned, and that I am to be your wife after all. Ah, Harry! isn't it splendid?"

"'Gad, little woman, I am the one who hasn't the right to realise. By Jove, I didn't give myself credit for the cleverness to fool every one so neatly. Really, don't you know, however, I feel a bit sorry for Miss Thursdale. She's a ripping good sort, and I'm sorry on that account."

Miss Courtenay—erstwhile governess—took hold of the lapels of his raincoat and looked seriously up into his face. "Are you sure you'll never regret giving her up for me—with all her money?"

"Oh, I say, Anne dear, it's I who am running away, not you. I've always wanted you—all my life. I've been something of a cad—"

"It wasn't your fault. Mrs. Thursdale was bound to have you. It's her way."

"It hurts my pride to say it, but hanged if I think—er—Eleanor was very strong for the match. I've a notion she was bullied into it."

"I'm quite sure of it."

"You're doing her a good turn, my dear. You see, I couldn't love her, and I'd probably have beaten her and all that. It wasn't as if I had to marry her for her money. Deuce take it, I've got a few pounds of my own."

"I'm only Anne Courtenay, the governess."

"You'll be Lady Windomshire some day, my word for it—if the other chaps manage to die, God bless

'em. I say, here's the train. Good-night, dear, up you go! I'll go up ahead. Don't forget! The wedding's at noon to-morrow."

The long, shadowy train came to a stop. He elbowed the porter aside and helped her up the steps. Neither of them noticed the vague figure which rushed across the platform and into the second car below.

"Where's the luggage car?" shouted Windomshire to the porter.

"The what?"

"I mean the baggage van."

"Way up front, sir. Where they're puttin' on the trunks, sir."

Swinging his travelling bag almost at arm's length, the long Englishman raced forward. His own and Miss Courtenay's pieces had come over during the afternoon, skilfully smuggled out of the Thursdale house. Just as he reached the baggage truck a panting, mud-covered individual dashed up from the opposite direction, madly rushing for the train. They tried to avoid a collision, but failed. A second later the two men were staring into each other's eyes, open-mouthed and dismayed.

"Hello!" gasped Dauntless, staggered.

"What the devil, sir, do— My word! It's Dauntless!" sputtered Windomshire.

"Where is she?" shouted Joe, convinced that his rival had captured his runaway fiancée and was now confronting him for explanation.

"Confound you, sir, it's none of your business,"

roared Windomshire, confident that Dauntless had been sent by Mrs. Thursdale to intercept him in his flight with the governess. "Damn your impudence!"

"Stand aside, Windomshire," exclaimed Joe, white with anger and dread. "I'm going to find her. What have you done with her?"

"You sha'n't interfere, Dauntless," cried Windomshire, squaring himself. "She's going to be my wife, and—"

"I guess *not*! Get out of my way, or—"

"She's on that train, confound you, and I'm going away with her whether you like it or not—or anybody else, for that matter," said Windomshire, refusing to budge an inch.

"Well, you'll have a damned hard time getting rid of me," roared Joe, trying to break past his rival. A baggage-man leaped between them in time to prevent blows. He held the angry, mistaken rivals apart,—rivals no longer, if they only knew. "Let go of me! Hold this fellow and I'll give you a hundred dollars—hold him till the train goes!"

"Hold me, will you? My word! What is this? A highway robbery!"

Both men broke away from the baggage-man and rushed frantically down the line of cars, each trying to hold the other back. Joe succeeded in grasping the handrail of the first sleeping-car, but his adversary pulled him away. An instant later they were struggling across the station platform, clasped in savage and hysterical combat. The station employees were

rushing up to separate them when the train began to move slowly away.

They came to their senses a moment later to find themselves held firmly by brawny peacemakers, the black cars rushing swiftly by without them.

Forgetting the battle so inopportunately begun, they started off madly in pursuit, shouting, yelling, commanding. But the flyer was deaf to their cries, calous against their tears. It whistled off into the north, carrying two trusting, nervous young women, who were secure in the belief that their liege lords to be were aboard, utterly unconscious of the true state of affairs. In the drawing-room of Car 5 Eleanor was still sitting, with her veil down, her rain-coat saturating the couch on which she sat stiff and silent. Anne Courtenay in Car 7 was philosophically preparing for bed, absolutely confident that the Englishman she had loved for years was not going to fail her.

Windomshire, alas, came to grief in his useless pursuit. He fell off the end of the platform and rolled in the mud, half stunned. When he painfully picked himself up, he saw Dauntless sitting on the edge of the walk, his haggard, staring face lighted by the glare of a sympathetic lantern. The station agent was offering vain but well-intended commiseration.

"Good God!" he heard Joe groan, but he did not catch the words, "she's gone without me!"

The next instant the distracted eloper was on his feet demanding a special engine.

"I've got to have it!" he shouted.

Windomshire's wits returned. Why not have a special too? It was the only way.

"You can order one for me, too," he exclaimed.

"At once. It's imperative."

CHAPTER III

THE MORNING AFTER

The sun was peeping over the hilltops and shooting his merry glance across the rainsoaked lowlands when Eleanor Thursdale awoke from her final snatch of slumber. A hundred feverish lapses into restless subconsciousness had marked the passage of nearly as many miles of clatter and turmoil. Never before had she known a train to be so noisy; never before had she lain awake long enough to make the natural discovery. It seemed hours before she dropped off in the first surrender to sleep; it seemed hours between the succeeding falls. Her brain and heart were waging the most relentless battle against peace and security. She *knew* Joe Dauntless was but two cars ahead, and yet she wondered if he were really there; she wondered and was troubled—oh, so troubled.

Daylight was creeping in beneath the curtain of the window. She stretched her fine, tired young body, and for the first time really felt like going to sleep. The perversity of early morning! Gradually it dawned upon her that the train was not moving; as far back as she could recall in her now wakeful spell it occurred to her that the cars had been standing

still and that everything was as quiet as death. She looked at her watch; it was six o'clock.

"Goodness!" she thought, sitting up suddenly, "what is the matter?" The curtain flew up and her startled eyes blinked out upon the glaring world.

There was not a house in sight as far as her eyes could range forward and behind. Instead, a wide sweep of farm lands partially submerged by the flood water of many rains. Far away there were brown hills and a long army of tall trees standing at attention,—a bleak prospect despite the cheery intentions of the sun, which lurked behind the hills. Despondent cornstalks of last year's growth stood guard over the soggy fields; drenched, unhappy tufts of grass, and forlorn but triumphant reeds arose here and there from the watery wastes, asserting their victory over a dismantled winter. It was not a glorious view that met the gaze of the bride on her wedding morn.

Strangest of all, the train was so quiet, so utterly inactive, that an absurd feeling of loneliness grew upon her, gradually developing into the alarming certainty that she was the only living person in the world. Then she heard men's voices outside of the window; her relief was almost hysterical. Scrambling out of the berth, she began a hasty, nervous toilet. Three sharp pushes on the button brought the company's ladies' maid—advertised as a part of the luxury and refinement which made the flyer "the finest train in the world."

"What has happened? Where are we?" she de-

manded, upon the entrance of the sleepy young coloured woman.

"The Pride River bridge is washed away, ma'am," said the maid. "We can't go on no furdur."

"Dear me," sighed Eleanor, turning to be buttoned at the back. "And where is Pride River bridge—or where was it, I mean?"

"'Bout twenty mile south of Omegon, ma'am—miss. The river's a sight—highest 'at it's ever been known. It's all over the bottoms. This here train came mighty nigh running into it, too. A boy flagged it just in time, 'bout five o'clock."

"Have we been standing here a whole hour?"

"Yes, miss; right here. They say we can't go back till the section boss has examined the track in Baxter's Cut. Seems as though there's some danger of a washout back yander."

"Do you mean to say we are likely to stay here indefinitely?" gasped Eleanor. "Ouch! Be careful, please!"

"Oh, it won't be long. The porter says they've sent back over the line to telegraph for the section men."

"Good Heavens, is there no station here?"

"No, ma'am; five miles back. They's one jist across the river, but it might as well be in Africa."

"Be quick, please, and then send the conductor to me—and the porter too," urged Eleanor, in distress.

The porter was the first to arrive.

"Porter, will you go to Car 7 and see if the occupant of lower 4 is awake? I am quite sure that is

right, but if it should happen to be wrong, please let me know at once."

"Yes, miss; and what shall I tell her?"

"Ahem! It's a—a gentleman. Ask him to—to come to the rear end of the train. That's all. Oh, conductor, how soon will we be on the track again?" The conductor was standing in the door, evidently impressed by the summons from the drawing-room.

"We're not off the track, madam. There is no danger—just a little delay. I have telegraphed to see if I can have a relief train come down from Omegon and pick us up after we've been ferried across the river."

"This is the very worst road I've ever travelled over—the very worst," was Eleanor's natural complaint. "When will that get us to Omegon?"

"We should be there in an hour after leaving here."

"And when did you say we'd leave here?"

"I didn't say. I don't know."

"Who does know, if you don't?" demanded Eleanor.

"God, I presume," observed the harassed conductor, turning away with the realisation that he had erred in coming to her in the first place. The porter returned at the moment.

"Nobody in that section, ma'am. It was sold, but the party didn't show up."

"Good Heavens, you—but he *did* show up. I—I know he did. Look again. Try—but wait! Ask for Mr. Dauntless. Ask quietly, please."

"Yes, ma'am."

Her nerves at highest tension, Miss Thursdale made her way toward the rear platform of the train. She passed down the curtained aisles of two coaches, wondering how people could sleep so soundly in a crisis like this. A porter politely opened a door and she slipped out upon the last platform. As far as the eye could reach stretched the roadbed and its telegraph poles, finally disappearing in the haze of the morning. Wide-spread flood, soaking the flat—

A sharp cry of amazement came from the track just below her. She looked down and into the eyes of Anne Courtenay, the governess. For a full minute they stared blankly at each other, apparently bereft of all the agencies that fall to the lot of woman.

"Miss Courtenay!" finally came from the lips of the girl on the platform.

"Miss Thursdale!" murmured Anne, reaching out to support herself against the bumper. Other words failed to come for the time being. In sheer despair, neither could accomplish more than a pallid smile. To the reader is left the privilege of analysing the thoughts which surged through the brains of the bewildered young women,—the fears, the doubts, the resentments.

"Where—where have you been?" at last fell from Miss Thursdale's lips.

"Been?" repeated Miss Courtenay, vaguely. "Oh, yes; I've been taking a walk—a constitutional. I always do."

Eleanor stared harder than ever. "All this distance?" she murmured.

"Down the track for half a mile, Miss Thursdale."

"Are—were you on this train?" ejaculated Eleanor.

"Yes—but I—I—" stammered Anne, her face growing red with rising resentment. "I did not think this of you."

"What do you mean? It is— May I ask why you are here, Miss Courtenay? It is most extraordinary."

"It is very easily explained," said Miss Courtenay, after a moment's battle with veracity. "My aunt is very ill in Vancouver." To herself she was saying: "I must keep her from really seeing Harry. She knows what he has done—in heaven's name, how could she have found it out?—and she is waiting to catch us if she can. She has followed us! Thank goodness, I've seen her first."

Eleanor was not blessed with the possibility of such an explanation for Anne's presence; she could only believe that the governess had been suddenly called to the bedside of her aunt—a real person, she happened to know, and very rich. But how was she to account for her own astonishing departure from home? Miss Courtenay had seen her at dinner; nothing had been said regarding "an unexpected journey." In truth, Eleanor remembered with inflexible accuracy that she had announced her intention to go to bed with a headache. Then, what must Miss Courtenay be thinking at this very instant?

An inspiration came to her like a flash. "I—I am

running away, Miss Courtenay," she cried, with a brave attempt to appear naïve.

"I don't understand," murmured poor Anne.

"Of course you don't," said Eleanor, inspiration heaping itself up within her. "Not really, you know, but just for a few days' rest. Mother thinks I'm looking wretchedly. We didn't say anything about it—except to Mr. Windomshire, of course. He knows. Perhaps he will run up to Omegon in a day or two to see me. It's very quiet there, and I'll get a good rest. The hotel is delightful—facing the lake. And the bathing's good. Dear me, I'm so sorry about your aunt." Miss Courtenay's eyes actually blinked with perplexity. This was a most staggering bit of news. Eleanor flushed painfully under the gaze of the other; utter rout followed. She stammered some flimsy excuse and dashed back into the car. To herself she was crying: "I must find Joe and tell him to keep out of sight. Oh, how awful this is!"

Just inside the door she met her porter.

"There's nobody named Dauntless on the train, miss. A gentleman who said he was his friend thinks he missed the train perhaps."

"He—he—oh, I see!" said Eleanor, suddenly perceiving method in Joe's reluctance to answer to his own name. "Thank you. That's all." Then to herself: "He has seen Miss Courtenay, and she *hasn't* seen him,—that's plain." She handed the porter a coin.

"I went to the berth you mentioned, ma'am, and I asked through the curtains: 'Is Mr. Dauntless in

here?' There was a lady in the upper, miss, an'—an'—well, I'll never forget what she said to me." Eleanor had gone before he concluded, determined to unearth her cautious lover, if possible.

Anne caught the porter before he could follow.

"See here, porter," she whispered softly, "go to Car 5, section 6, and call its occupant. Tell him *not* to get up. Do you understand? *Not* to get up!"

It goes without saying, of course, that all efforts, secret or otherwise, failed to locate the missing men. The distracted brides, each trying to run away from the other in a way, were in a state of collapse, necessarily subdued but most alarming. The Rev. Henry Derby, a nice-looking young fellow, who looked more like a tennis player than a minister of the gospel, eventually identified his old friend's ladye faire, and introduced himself with a discreetness that proved him to have been in college at the proper period and in a somewhat different class from that which he now sought to lead. In the privacy of her drawing-room the bewitching but distressed young woman discussed the situation with the man who had been chosen to perform the clandestine ceremony in the far-away town of Omegon. Derby, coming on from his eastern home in loyal acquiescence to his friend's request, had designedly taken this train, it being understood that Dauntless would board it at Fenlock with his fair conspirator. We all know why Dauntless failed to perform his part of the agreement; Derby, with the perspicuity of a college man, finally advanced a reason for his inexplicable failure to appear. Eleanor

had begun tearfully to accuse him of abandoning her at the last moment; Mr. Derby indignantly scouted the idea. When she related their chase in the motor and their escape from Windomshire, he formed his conclusions, and they were in the main remarkably correct.

"I'm afraid, Miss Thursdale, that your disappointed lover, our ancient enemy, the Englishman, was not to be overcome so neatly. Has it occurred to you that he may have reached Fenlock before the train left, and that he is the explanation for Joe's non-appearance?"

"You—you don't mean that he has killed—" she was gasping, growing whiter and whiter. He hastened to reassure her.

"Oh, no; not so bad as that. But is it possible and quite probable that he—if, as you say, he was on to your—I should say, aware of your flight, it is probable that he succeeded in detaining Joe in Fenlock. That would—"

"Impossible! Joe wouldn't let him!" she cried indignantly.

"Perhaps Joe couldn't help himself. Such things happen. At any rate, you'll understand, the despised enemy could have—"

"Mr. Windomshire is not a despised enemy. He's a *very* nice man, Mr. Derby," she interrupted.

"Certainly, Miss Thursdale. What I meant to say was, that he was morally sure of preventing the wedding if he could only keep you far enough apart. Now that is probably what he has done. You can't

marry Joe in Omegon or anywhere else unless he is there and not in Fenlock."

"I see. Well, I'll go back to Fenlock!" she exclaimed emphatically, a little line of determination and stubbornness settling about the erstwhile trembling lips.

"I admire your loyalty," he said warmly. "Just at present, however, we are water-bound here, and we've got to make the best of it. I fancy Joe will telegraph before long."

"If—if he hasn't been hurt. Oh, Mr. Derby, they may have fought. It would be just like them. It may be dreadfully serious. You don't know as much about men as I do. They're terribly—"

"Please don't worry, Miss Thursdale," he said, smiling in recollection of his football days. "You'll find there's been nothing bloody about all this. The delay is vexatious, but only temporary, I'm sure."

"I'll marry Joe Dauntless now if it has to be delayed a hundred years," she cried, her eyes flashing.

During the next half-hour poor Derby ran errands, carried messages and complaints to every one of the train men, finally administering smelling salts when it occurred to Eleanor that Joe might have fallen off the train during the night.

In the meantime Anne Courtenay was having a sad half-hour of it. She had no one to turn to, no one to think it all out for her; she was alone and in great despair. The porter had failed to find the tall Englishman; the conductor had been equally unsuccessful; she herself had searched in vain. His trunks

and hers were in the baggage car, she found, but there was no sign of the man himself. She was a self-reliant, sensible young woman, accustomed to the rigours of the world, but this was quite too overwhelming. The presence on the train of the girl that she had, to all intents and purposes, cruelly deceived, did not add to her comfort. As a matter of fact, she was quite fond of Eleanor; they were warm friends despite the vagaries of love. Miss Courtenay, among other things, began to wonder, as she sat in her tumbled berth, if retribution had more to do with this than chance.

"Could he have fallen off the train?" she wondered, with a sudden chill of apprehension. The next instant she was calling to the porter. "Send the conductor to me at once. My friend has fallen off the train—out of his window, perhaps. I am quite sure of it. I want an engine to go back and look for him. Hurry, please! don't stand there grinning."

The Pullman conductor came up at that moment.

"Are you the young lady who was asking for Mr. Dauntless?" he asked.

"Dauntless?" she murmured. "No, I'm asking for an engine. Have you—"

"There's another young lady asking for an engine, too, madam. It's impossible."

"Am I to understand that I shall have to walk?—Oh," with a sudden start, "is—is there a Mr. Dauntless missing too?"

"Seems so. He's gone."

Anne dropped the curtains in his face, and then

stared at them for a long time. Gradually she began to comprehend. A panic of fear came over her.

"They have met somewhere and quarrelled! Mr. Dauntless was jealous—terribly so. He may have—good Heavens!—he may have killed him in the mistaken idea that Harry was running away with Eleanor. She's on this train! It's perfectly natural, Porter," she called, "there has been foul play!"

"Gee, miss! That's what the other lady is saying!"

"The other—then it is a double murder! Don't laugh! It's—it's—"

"Don't cry, miss; it's all right." She looked at him piteously for a moment, and then smiled at the absurdity of her conjecture.

A tousled head came from between the curtains of the upper berth opposite, and a sleepy, hoarse voice demanded:

"How long will we be here? What's the latest?"

"We're on time, sah," replied the porter, from sheer force of habit.

"The devil we are! Say, I've got to be in Omegon by ten o'clock. I'll sue this infernal road," snarled the irascible party, snapping the curtains together. It transpired that he was an agent for a medical college, travelling to Omegon on a most unwholesome but edifying mission. He was going up to take possession of the body of a man who had willed his carcass to the school. As the poor chap was not yet dead, but hopelessly ill, the desire for haste on the part of the agent may be misunderstood. It seems,

part of the agent may be misunderstood. It seems, however, that there was some talk of interference by relatives—and the disquieting prospect of a new will.

“If I were you, miss,” counselled the porter, “I’d go out and take a little walk. The sun is up, an’ it’s fine. The relief train will be here ’fore long—an’ you all will be rowed acrost the river. Don’t worry.”

“But I want to go back the way I came,” expostulated Anne, feebly. “I can’t go on without—until I know what has happened to—to Mr. Windomshire.” She took his advice, however, and made her way to the rear platform.

A number of disgruntled passengers were now aboard, and complaining bitterly of the delay. There was no hope of breakfast until the train reached Omegon, where a dining car was waiting. She stood on the platform and looked gloomily back over the long stretch of roadbed.

“Isn’t that an engine coming?” some one asked excitedly at her side. She turned and found Miss Thursdale, attended by a gentleman, to whom the question was addressed.

“I believe—yes, it is, Miss Thursdale.”

“Then—then we’ll all be taken back to the city,” she said dejectedly.

“I fancy not. It’s probably bringing relief.”

“They—they may be bringing bad news,” Eleanor groaned. “Oh, Miss Courtenay, how do you do—again? How is your—your grandmother, wasn’t it?”

“I—I—yes, I think so—I mean, I think she’s no

better. They may be bringing his body!" said the other girl, her eyes fixed on the distant locomotive.

"Oh!" almost screamed Eleanor, and stared wildly without words.

A brakeman far down the track was flagging the locomotive; it came to a stop, and several men were seen climbing down from the cab. Two of them eventually disengaged themselves from the little group and hurried forward. One was carrying a suitcase, and both walked as though they were either in pain or attended by extreme old age.

"Why—why—" gasped Eleanor, "it's Joe!"

"And—yes, thank God, it's Har—Mr. Windomshire," almost shrieked Anne.

Then they turned and looked at each other in confusion. Neither had the courage to carry out the desire to fly to the arms of the man she longed to see more than all else in the world. They felt themselves to be caught red-handed.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. VAN TRUDER INTRUDES

None but the most eager, loving eyes could possibly have recognised the newcomers. It is not unlikely that the remaining passengers mistook them for tramps. The rivals, morbidly suspicious of each other, taciturn to the point of unfriendliness, had indeed chartered a locomotive—not jointly by intention, but because of provoking necessity. There was but one engine to be had. It is safe to say that while they travelled many sore and turbulent miles in close proximity to each other, neither felt called upon to offer or to demand an explanation.

Five hours in the tender of an engine had done much to reduce them to the level of the men in the cab, so far as personal appearance was concerned. They were still wearing their raincoats, much crumpled and discoloured; their faces were covered with coal dust; they were wet, bedraggled, and humble to the last degree. The American, naturally, was the one who clung to his suit-case; he had foreseen the need for a change of linen. They came toward the train with hesitating, uncertain steps. If their souls were gladdened by the sight of the two young women, general appearances failed to make record of it. It

was noted by those who watched their approach that once both of them stopped short and seemed to waver in their determination to advance. That was when each became suddenly aware of the presence of an unexpected girl. Naturally, the Englishman was seriously staggered. The unexplained Eleanor appeared before his very eyes as an accusing nemesis; it is no wonder that his jaw dropped and his befuddled brain took to whirling.

The girls, less regardful of appearances, climbed down from the platform and started forward to meet their knights-errant. The reader may readily appreciate the feelings of the quartette. Not one of them knew just precisely how much or how little the others knew; they were precariously near to being lost in the labyrinth. Something intangible but regular urged Windomshire to be politic; he advanced to meet Eleanor as if it were her due. Anne fell back, perplexed and hurt.

"Hang it all," thought Joe, rage in his heart, "he beat me to her, after all. He'll be enough of a damned ass to try to kiss her before all these people, too." Whereupon, he closed his eyes tightly. When he opened them, Miss Courtenay was walking beside him and asking questions about the weather. Her cheeks were very pink. Windomshire had awkwardly clasped the hand of Miss Thursdale, muttering something not quite intelligible, even to himself. Eleanor was replying with equal blitheness.

"How nice of you to come. Where are you going?"

"Surprised, are you?" he was floundering. "Charmed. Ha, ha! By Jove, Eleanor—er—I heard you were booked by this train and I—I tried to catch it for a bit of a ride with you. I missed it, don't you know. I'll—I'll wager you don't know what I did in my desperation."

"I couldn't guess," she said, trying to catch Joe's eye.

"I hired a private engine, 'pon my word, and then telegraphed ahead to stop this train!"

"Di—did you do that?" she gasped, forgetting that the bridge was out.

Dauntless, meantime, was trying to explain to Miss Courtenay. She already had told him that her aunt was ill in Vancouver, and he had smiled politely and aimlessly.

"I'm on my way to M——. Sudden trip, very important," he was saying. "Missed the train—I dare say it was this one—so I took an engine to follow up. Had to ride in the tender."

"It must have been important," she ventured.

"It was. I—" then with an inspired plunge—"I was due at a wedding."

"How unfortunate! I hope you won't miss it altogether."

Joe caught his breath and thought: "Now what the devil did she mean by that? Has Eleanor told her the whole story?"

It must not be supposed that these young persons were lacking in the simpler gifts of intelligence; they were, individually, beginning to put two and two to-

gether, as the saying goes. They were grasping the real situation—groping for it, perhaps, but with a clear-sightedness and acumen which urged that a cautious tongue was expedient. If the duplicity was really as four-handed as it seemed, there could be no harm in waiting for the other fellow to blunder into exposure. Nothing could be explained, of course, until the conspirators found opportunity to consult privately under the new order of assignment.

“How romantic!” Eleanor said, as she walked stiffly ahead with her uncomfortable fiancé.

“Eh?” was his simple remark. He was suddenly puzzled over the fact that he *had* caught up to the train. There was something startling in that. “Oh—er—not at all romantic, most prosaic. Couldn’t get a coach. Been here long?”

“Since five o’clock.”

“I—I suppose you got up to see the sunrise.”

“No, to see the river rise,” she replied. “The bridge is gone.” He was silent for twenty paces, trying to recall what he had said about telegraphing ahead.

“You don’t mean it! Then I daresay they haven’t got my telegram stopping the train.”

“How annoying!”

Dauntless had just said to Anne, in a fit of disgust: “Windomshire’s got a lot of nerve. That was my engine, you know. I hired it.”

Windomshire went on to say, careful that Joe was quite out of hearing: “Mr. Dauntless was quite annoying. He got into my engine without an invita-

tion, and I'm hanged if he'd take a hint, even after I hired a stoker to throw a spadeful of coal over him. I don't know why he should be in such a confounded hurry to get to—what's the name of the place? I—er—I really think I must go and speak to Miss Courtenay, Eleanor. She—er—looks ill."

"It's her grandmother who is ill—not she. But, yes! Please try to cheer her up a bit, Harry. She's terribly upset."

"I'm sure she is," muttered he, dropping back with more haste than gallantry. Mr. Dauntless sprang forward with equal alacrity, and wrong was right a moment later.

"Joe dear," whispered Eleanor, "I've been nearly crazy. What happened?" He was vainly trying to clasp her hand.

"Nell, he's on to us. I wish I knew just why Miss Courtenay is here. Lord, I'll never forget that ride."

"It was just like you to take advantage of his engine."

"His engine!" exploded Joe, wrathfully. Securely separated from the others, the elopers analysed the situation as best they could. Two separate enterprises struggled earnestly for an outcome. On the surface, the truth seemed plain enough: it was quite clear to both parties that the extraordinary chain of coincidence was not entirely due to Providence. There was something of design behind it all. The staggering part was the calamitous way in which chance had handled their dear and private affairs.

"He doesn't know that you were in my automo-

bile," concluded Dauntless, almost at the same time that a like opinion was being expressed by Windomshire. "Are you willing to go on with it, Nell? Are you scared out of it?"

"No, indeed," she exclaimed, perplexity leaving her brow. "At first I feared he might have telegraphed to mother, but now I am sure he hasn't. He was not following me at all. He is in love with Anne, and he was surreptitiously off for a part of the distance with her. He really doesn't want to marry me, you know."

"Well, he isn't going to, you see. By all that is holy, nothing shall stop us now, dear. We'll go on to Omegon and carry out everything just as we planned. If he's running off after another girl, it's time you put an end to him. Don't give him a thought."

"Don't you think we'd better talk it over with Mr. Derby? He discreetly disappeared when he saw it was you."

"Right! Let's hunt him out. By Jove, we can have him marry us right here,—great!"

"No," she cried firmly, "it *must* be in a church." He could not move her from that stand.

"Oh, if we could only get across that confounded river!" scolded Joe, as they went off in search of Derby.

Windomshire was slowly reconciling himself to the fact that Eleanor loved Dauntless, but he could not get it out of his head that she still expected to marry as her mother had planned.

"See here, Anne, it's all very well to say that she loves Dauntless. Of course she does. But that isn't going to prevent her from marrying me. I don't believe she was running away with him, don't you know. He was simply following her. That's the way these Americans do, you know. Now, the question is, won't she think it odd that you and I should happen to be doing almost the same thing?"

"To be sure she will," said Anne, coolly. "She has a very bad opinion of me. I'm sure she doesn't believe you expect to marry me."

"By Jove, dear, it sounds rather dreadful, doesn't it?" he groaned. "But of course you *are* going to marry me, so what's the odds? Then she can marry Dauntless to her heart's content. I say, are we never to get away from this beastly place?"

"They are to row us across the river in boats. We'll be taken up by another train over there and carried on. Poor Mr. Dauntless, he looks so harassed."

"By Jove, I feel rather cut up about him. He ought to have her, Anne. He's a decent chap, although he was da--very unreasonable last night. I like him, too, in spite of the fact that he kicked coal over me twice in that confounded bin. He was good enough to take a cinder out of my eye this morning, and I helped him to find his watch in the coal-bin. I say, Anne, we might get a farm waggon and drive to some village where there is a minister—"

"No, Harry! you know I've set my heart on being married in a church. It seems so much more decent

and—regular; especially after what has just happened.”

A porter appeared in the rear platform and shouted a warning to all those on the ground.

“Get yo’ things together. The boat’ll be ready in ten minutes, ladies and gen’l’men.” The locomotive uttered a few sharp whistles to reinforce his shouts, and everybody made a rush for the cars.

The conductor and other trainmen had all they could do to reassure the more nervous and apprehensive of the passengers, many of whom were afraid of the swollen, ugly river just ahead. Boats had been sent up from a town some miles down the stream, and the passengers with their baggage, the express, and the mail pouches were to be ferried across. Word had been received that a makeshift train would pick them up on the other side, not far from the wrecked bridge, and take them to Omegon as quickly as possible.

It was also announced that the company would be unable to send a train beyond Omegon and into the northwest for eight or ten hours, owing to extensive damage by the floods. Repairs to bridges and road-bed were necessary. In the meantime, the passengers would be cared for at the Somerest Hotel in Omegon, at the company’s expense. The company regretted and deplored, etc.

There was a frightful clamour by the through passengers, threats of lawsuits, claims for damage, execrations, and groans. In time, however, the whole company went trooping down the track under the

leadership of the patient conductor. It was a sorry, disgruntled parade. Everybody wanted a porter at once, and when he could not get one, berated the road in fiercer terms than ever; men who had always carried their own bags to escape feeing a porter, now howled and raged because there was not an army of them on the spot. Everybody was constantly "damning" the luck.

The conductor led his charges from the track through a muddy stubble-field and down to a point where half a dozen small rowboats were waiting among the willows. Dauntless and Eleanor were well up in front, their faces set resolutely toward Omegon. For some well-defined reason, Windomshire and Anne were the last in the strange procession. The medical college agent, the tall and sombre Mr. Hooker, was the first man into a boat. He said it was a case of life or death.

Eleanor looked backward down the long file of trailers, a little smile on her lips.

"They are not all going away to be married, are they, Joe?" she said, taking note of the unbroken array of sour countenances.

"It looks like a funeral, my dear. Look at the cadaverous individual beside the con—Heavens, Nell, isn't that—by George, it is! It's old Mrs. Van Truder! Back there about half-way—the fat one. See her? Good Lord!"

Eleanor turned pale and the joyous light fled from her eyes.

"Oh, dear! I forgot that the Van Truders spend

all their summers at Omegon. And it is she—and he, too. Oh, Joe, it's just awful!"

"She's the worst old cat in town," groaned Dauntless. "We can't escape her. She'll spot us, and she'll never let go of us. I don't mind him. He's so near-sighted he couldn't see us. But she!"

"She will suspect, Joe—she's sure to suspect, and she'll watch us like a hawk," whispered the distressed Eleanor. The Van Truders lived in the same block with the Thursdales in town. "She'll telegraph to mother!"

"That reminds me," muttered Joe, looking at his watch. "I had hoped to telegraph to your mother about this time."

"She will forgive us," said she, but she failed in her assumption of confidence. As a matter of fact she felt that her mother would not forgive.

"Well, you left a note pinned on your pillow," said he, as if that covered all the sins.

"Yes, but it was directed to Miss Courtenay, asking her to break it gently to mamma," said she, dismally.

They had reached the edge of the river by this time and others came up with them. For a while they managed to keep out of old Mrs. Van Truder's range of vision, but her sharp eyes soon caught sight of them as they tried to slip into a boat that was already crowded to its full capacity.

"Why, Eleanor Thursdale!" shouted the old lady, her aristocratic eyes almost crossing in their stare of amazement.

"Discovered!" groaned Dauntless to the willows.

Mrs. Van Truder pounced upon Eleanor and, between personal questions and impersonal reflections upon non-government railways, gave her a dizzy quarter of an hour. She ignored Mr. Dauntless almost completely,—quite entirely when she discovered Mr. Windomshire in the background. Little old Mr. Van Truder, in his usual state of subjection, was permitted to study the scenery at close range.

"I was so afraid you'd marry that horrid Dauntless fellow," whispered Mrs. Van Truder. Eleanor gave vent to a constrained laugh.

"How perfectly preposterous!"

"When are you to be married, my dear?"

"At once—I mean, quite soon. Isn't the scenery beautiful, Mr. Van Truder?" asked Eleanor in desperation.

"It's too far away. I can't see it," grumbled the old gentleman.

"He's so very near-sighted," explained his wife.

"Do you expect to stay long at the Somerset?"

"It all depends," said Eleanor, with a glance at Dauntless.

"Isn't that your governess with Mr. Windomshire? I can't be mistaken."

"Yes, she's going out to spend a few weeks with a rich aunt,—her sister's mother, I think."

"How's that?" gasped the old lady.

"I mean her mother's sister."

"It sounded very strange, my dear."

"About the mother having a sister?" guessed

old Mr. Van Truder, sharply. "Seems all right to me."

"They are going to row us across the river," volunteered Eleanor, helplessly.

"Good-morning, Mr. Windomshire," called Mrs. Van Truder. Windomshire started and got very red in the face. Miss Courtenay's bow went unnoticed by the old lady. In sheer despair, the Englishman turned to Dauntless, a fellow-sufferer.

"I say, old man," he began nervously, "I'd like to ask a favour of you."

"Go ahead—anything I can do," said the other, blankly. Windomshire continued in lowered tones:

"Deucedly awkward, but I forgot my bags at Fenlock. I see you've got yours. Would you mind lending me a fresh shirt and a collar, old chap?"

"Gladly," cried Joe, very much relieved. "Will you take them now?" starting to open his bag. Windomshire hastily interposed.

"I'd rather not, old chap. It's rather exposed here, don't you know. Later on, if you please. Thanks, old man; I'll not forget this." They shook hands without any apparent excuse.

"Mr. Windomshire!" called Mrs. Van Truder. He turned with a hopeless look in his eyes. The two girls had misery and consternation plainly stamped in their faces. "We can't all go over in the next boats, you know. I've no doubt you and Miss Thursdale would not in the least mind being left to the last," with a sly smile.

"Oh—er—ah, by Jove!" gasped Windomshire,

with a glance at the still faces of the young women. He saw no relief there.

"Blamed cat!" muttered Dauntless, gritting his teeth.

"Mr. Dauntless, will you and Miss Courtenay come with us in this boat? I want some one to keep the snakes away; Mr. Van Truder can't see them, you know."

There was no way out of it. Joe and Anne meekly followed the Van Truders into the wobbly boat, resentment in their hearts, uncertainty in their minds. They rowed away, leaving Windomshire and Eleanor standing among the willows, ill at ease and troubled beyond expression.

CHAPTER V

AS NIGHT APPROACHES

Neither spoke until the boat came to its slippery, uncertain landing-place on the opposite side of the river. Then each breathed easier, in a sigh that seemed to express both relief and dismay.

"It's a very ugly looking river," she murmured encouragingly. She was afraid he might feel obliged, in honour, to offer an explanation for his presence, perhaps attempt to convince her in some tangible way that she was to expect nothing but slavish devotion from him in the future.

"I don't wonder that the bridge gave way," he replied politely. They looked at each other involuntarily, and then instantly looked away.

"I'd give my head to know what she expects of me," thought Windomshire miserably.

"How I despise that old woman!" welled up in Eleanor's bitter heart. Everything was awry. Luckily for both of them a small boy slipped into the river at that moment. He was rescued by the brakeman, but not until the catastrophe had served its purpose as a godsend. The excitement which attended the rescue saved the couple an uncomfortable ten minutes. Eleanor went to the assistance of the dis-

tracted mother; Windomshire, in his eagerness to do something, offered to exchange clothes with the dripping trainman; the small boy howled as lustily as his wheezy lungs would permit. Everybody shouted advice to the mother, rebukes to the boy, and praise to the hero; altogether Providence was acting most handsomely.

At last the final boatload of passengers crossed the river and drew up at the landing; Eleanor, with her bewildered fiancé, stepped into the beaming presence of Mrs. Van Truder.

"Come with us," she said with a friendliness that shattered all hope. "Mr. Van Truder has just arranged for breakfast at that farmhouse over there. The relief train won't be here for half an hour or more and you must be famished." Eleanor's flimsy excuses were unavailing; her protestations that she could not eat a mouthful fell on obdurate ears. Windomshire, catching sight of the forlorn Anne, was about to assert himself vigorously in declining the invitation when a meaning look from the governess caused him to refrain. The look very plainly told him to accept.

The unhappy couple followed the Van Truders to the nearby farmhouse. They left behind them on the edge of the crowd, seated side by side on a pile of ties, two miserable partners in the fiasco. Gloomy, indeed, was the outlook for Miss Courtenay and the despised Mr. Dauntless. They were silent for many minutes after the departure, rage in their hearts. Then Mr. Dauntless could hold his tongue no longer.

"Damn her!" he exploded so viciously that Anne jumped and cried out,—

"Mr. Dauntless!"

"Oh, you feel just as I do about it only you won't say it aloud," he exclaimed. "I won't stand for it!"

"I—I am sure Miss Thursdale has done nothing to deserve your curses," she began diplomatically.

"Good Heavens, Miss Courtenay, you—Oh, I say, you know I didn't mean Eleanor. The old pelican—that's the one. Old Mrs. Intruder," he grated.

"I am sure it is all quite regular," observed Anne, so seriously that he looked at her in wonder. It began to creep into his head that his speculations were wrong, after all. At any rate it seemed advisable to put a sharp curb on his tongue.

"I'm sorry I spoke as I did about the old lady," he said, after a moment's reflection. "I was thinking of the way in which she left you out of her invitation to breakfast."

"And yourself, incidentally," she smiled.

"Miss Courtenay, I'm—I'm a confounded ass for not thinking of your breakfast. It's not too late. We are both hungry. Won't you come with me and have a bit of something to eat? We'll try that farmhouse ourselves. Come, let us hurry or the crowd will get in ahead of us. Ham and eggs and coffee! they always have that sort of breakfast in farmhouses, I'm told. Come."

She sprang up cheerfully, and followed him across the meadow to the farmhouse. The Van Truder

party was entering the door, smoke pouring forth suggestively from a chimney in the rear of the house. The sudden desire for ham and eggs was overcoming, in a way, the pangs of outraged love; there was solace in the new thought.

That breakfast was one never to be forgotten by four persons; two others remembered it to their last days on account of its amazing excellence. A dozen persons were crowded into the little dining-room; no one went forth upon his travels with an empty stomach. No such profitable harvest had ever been reaped by the farmer. Dauntless and Anne ate off of a sewing-table in the corner. Mrs. Van Truder deliberately refused to hear Mr. Windomshire's timorous suggestion that they "make room" for them at the select table. Silent anathemas accompanied every mouthful of food that went down the despot's throat, but she did not know it. Fortunately the lovers were healthy and hungry. They fared forth after that memorable breakfast with lighter hearts, though still misplaced by an unrelenting fate.

All the way to Omegon Anne sat in the seat with the seething Dauntless, each nursing a pride that had received almost insupportable injuries during the morning hours. Windomshire and Eleanor, under the espionage of the "oldest friend of the family," moped and sighed with a frankness that could not have escaped more discerning eyes. Mrs. Van Truder, having established herself as the much needed chaperon, sat back complacently and gave her

charges every opportunity to hold private and no doubt sacred communication in the double seat just across the aisle.

Eleanor pleaded fatigue, and forthwith closed her wistful eyes. Windomshire, with fine consideration, sank into a rapt study of the fitting farm lands. Having got but little sleep among the coals, he finally dropped off into a peaceful cat nap.

Omegeon was reached before Eleanor had the courage to awaken him. She did so then only because it was impossible for her to crawl over his knees without losing her dignity; they were planted sturdily against the seat in front. She fled like a scared child to Joe's side, her mind made up to cling to him now, no matter what manner of opposition prevailed.

"I'll go with you, Joe," she whispered fiercely. "I don't care what any one says or thinks. Your cousin *will* meet us with the carriage, won't he?" she concluded piteously. Windomshire also had taken the bull by the horns and was helping Miss Courtenay from the train with an assiduity that brought down the wrath of obstructing passengers upon his devoted head.

"He said he would," replied Dauntless, his spirits in the clouds. "We must get away from these people, Nell. "I'll go crazy in another minute. There's Derby waiting for instructions. Dear old Darb—he's a brick. My cousin Jim is a deacon or something in the village church, dear, and he has promised to let us in. I suppose he has a key. He and his wife will be the only witnesses. By George, nothing can

stop us now, dear, if you have the nerve to—Where the dickens is Jim? Confound him, I don't see him on the platform."

He looked about the station platform—first anxiously, then impatiently, then—with consternation! His cousin was nowhere in sight. Cold with apprehensiveness, he dashed over to a citizen who wore a star upon his coat, almost dragging Eleanor after him.

"Is Jim Carpenter here? Have you seen him? Do you know him?" he demanded.

"He was here, mister. 'Bout two hours ago, I reckon. I guess you must be the fellow he was to meet—"

"Yes, yes,—where is he now?"

"I don't know, mister. His wife's got pneumonia, an' he told me to tell you he couldn't wait. He took the doctor right out to—"

"Good Lord!" exploded Joe. The citizen jumped a few inches into the air. "He's gone?"

"Yep. But he told me to tell you to go over to the Somerset an' wait till you hear from him."

"Wait—till—I hear—from—him?" groaned Dauntless, wild-eyed but faint. He and Eleanor looked at each other in despair.

"Go—to—the—hotel?" she murmured, her heart in her boots. "I never can do that," she continued. Her voice was full of tears.

Mrs. Van Truder bore down upon them like an angry vulture. They saw her coming, but neither had the strength of purpose to move.

Before they really knew how it happened, she was leading Eleanor to the hotel 'bus and he was limply following, lugging both bags with a faithfulness that seemed pathetic. Two minutes later they were in the 'bus, touching knees with the equally dazed and discomfited English people.

Back on the platform the elongated medical gentleman, Mr. Hooker, was talking loudly, wrathfully to the station agent. His voice rang in their ears long after the 'bus rolled away on its "trip" to the big summer hotel.

"You say old man Grover ain't dead yet?" Mr. Hooker was growling resentfully, even indignantly.

"He ain't expected to live till night, sir, poor old man," replied the agent.

"Well, I'll be damned!" roared Mr. Hooker. "I don't see any sense in a man of his age hanging on like this. He's eighty-three. My time is valuable"—looking at his big silver watch—"and I can't afford to hang around here if he's going to act like this." The agent stared after him as if he were looking at a maniac. Mr. Hooker set off in the direction of old Mr. Grover's house, which had been pointed out to him by a gaping small boy. "I'll go up and see about it," he remarked, as he stepped across a wide rivulet in the middle of the main street.

The Somerset Hotel was situated on the most beautiful point of land touching that trim little lake which attracted hundreds of city people annually by its summer wiles. It was too sedate and quiet to be

fashionable; the select few who went there sought rest from the frivolities of the world. Eleanor Thursdale had spent one tiresome but proper season there immediately after the death of her father. She hated everything in connection with the place except the little old-fashioned church at the extreme end of the village street, fully half a mile from the hotel. She had chosen it, after romantic reflection, as the sanctuary in which she should become the wife of the man she loved, spurning the great church in town and one of its loveless matches.

The forenoon is left to the imagination of the reader,—with all of its unsettled plans, its doubts and misgivings, its despairs and its failures, its subterfuges and its strategies, its aggravations and complaints. Bell-boys carried surreptitious notes from room to room; assurances, hopes, and reassurances passed one another in systematic confusion. Love was trying to find its way out of the maze.

Immediately after luncheon Dauntless set out to discover his faithless cousin. Eleanor kept close to her room, in readiness for instant flight. The necessary Mr. Derby had his instructions to remain where he could be found without trouble. Mrs. Van Truder, taking up Eleanor's battles, busied herself and every one else in the impossible task of locating the young woman's trunks, which, according to uncertain reports, had gone mysteriously astray. Moreover, she had prepared a telegram to the young lady's mother, assuring her that she was quite safe; but Mr. Daunt-

less boldly intercepted Mr. Van Truder on his way to the desk.

“Allow me,” he remarked, deliberately taking the despatch from the old gentleman. “I’ll send it from the station. Don’t bother about it, Mr. Van Truder.” He drove through the village, but did not stop at the station; his instructions to the driver did not include a pause anywhere. It is not necessary to relate what took place when he descended upon the unfortunate Jim; it is sufficient to say that he dragged him from his sick wife’s bedside and berated him soundly for his treachery. Then it was all rearranged,—the hapless Jim being swept into promises which he could not break, even with death staring his wife in the face. The agitated Mr. Dauntless drove back to the hotel with a new set of details perfected. This time nothing should go wrong.

His first action was to acquaint Derby with the plans, and then to send a note of instructions to Eleanor, guarding against any chance that they might not be able to communicate with each other in person.

“It’s all fixed,” he announced to Derby, in a secluded corner of the grounds. “To-night at nine we are to be at the church down the road there—see it? Nobody is on to us, and Jim has a key. He will meet you there at a quarter of nine. But, hang it all, his wife can’t act as a witness. We’ve got to provide one. He suggested the postmaster, but I don’t like the idea; it looks too much like a cheap elopement. I’d just as soon have the cook or the housemaid. I’ll

get Eleanor there if I have to kill that Van Truder woman. Now, whom shall we have as the second witness?"

"Windomshire, I'm afraid," lamented Derby. "You won't be able to get rid of him."

"Hang him!" groaned Dauntless, his spirits falling, but instantly reviving. "But he's dead in love with Miss Courtenay. It's pitiful, old man. He feels that he's got to marry Nell, but it's not in his heart to do it. Now if we could only shunt him off on to Miss Courtenay this evening! Her train leaves at nine, they say. He might be forced to take her to the station if you will only get busy and make him jealous."

"Jealous? I?"

"Certainly. It won't be much of an effort for you, and it will help me immensely. Make love to her this afternoon, and when you suggest taking her to the station this evening he'll be so wrought up that he won't stand for it. See what I mean?"

"Now see here, Joe, I'm willing to do a great deal for you, but this is too much. You forget that I am a minister of the gospel. It's—"

"I know, old man, but you might do a little thing like this for— By Jove, I've got it! Why not have old Mr. Van Truder for the other witness?"

Mr. Van Truder was crossing the lawn, picking his way carefully.

"Good afternoon," greeted Dauntless.

"Afternoon," responded Mr. Van Truder. "Is this the hotel?"

"No, sir; the hotel is about ten feet to your left. By the way, Mr. Van Truder, would you mind doing me a favour this evening?"

"Gladly. Who are you?"

"Joe Dauntless."

"Anything, my dear Joe."

"Well, it's a dead secret."

"A secret? Trust me," cried the old man, joyfully.

"First, let me introduce my friend, the Rev. Mr. Derby. He's in the secret. It will go no farther, I trust, Mr. Van Truder."

"My wife says I can't keep a secret, but I'll show her that I can. Trust me, my boy."

"I'll bet you a hundred dollars you can't keep this one," said Joe, inspired.

"Done!"

"Well," bravely but cautiously, "I'm going to be married to-night. Be careful now! Look out! Don't explode! Remember the bet!" The old gentleman repressed his feelings.

"Beautiful!" he exclaimed. "Congratulations, my boy."

"Now for the favour. I want you to act as a witness. It's to be a very quiet affair." Dauntless explained as much of the situation to him as he thought necessary, omitting the lady's name. Mr. Van Truder bubbled over with joy and eagerness. He promised faithfully to accompany Mr. Derby, pooh-hooing the suggestion that he could not slip away from the hotel without his wife being aware of the fact.

"Trust me, my boy. Don't worry. I'm always Johnny-on-the-spot. Where did you say the hotel was? I'll go up and get ready. Oh, by the way, who is the young lady?"

"She's a friend of Mr. Dauntless's," said Mr. Derby.

"To be sure; I might have known. Silly question."

The young men watched him enter the hotel, but they did not see him fall into the clutches of his wife just inside the door.

"Where have you been?" demanded Mrs. Van Truder.

"I've been looking everywhere for you, my dear," he said, almost whimpering. "I've got a grand secret, but I can't tell you. Don't ask me!"

"Is it a wedding?" she demanded sternly.

"Dear me! Do you know it too?" he cried, bewildered. "But that's not the real secret; it's only part of it. Joe is going to marry some friend of his to-night—but that's as far as I'll go. I'll *not* betray the secret." He hurried away to avoid questions, muttering to himself as he went: "She's dying to know. But a secret's a secret. She sha'n't know that I am to be a witness."

Mrs. Van Truder pondered long and deeply, but she was not well enough acquainted with all of the facts to hazard a guess as to who the girl might be. It came to her memory that Dauntless had been with Miss Courtenay all morning, however, and she wondered not a little. Windomshire was approaching in

search of Anne, who was to have met him as if by accident in a corner of the reading-room.

"Oh, Mr. Windomshire," exclaimed Mrs. Van Truder, darting toward him.

"How do, Mrs. Van Truder? How are you to-day?" he asked, scarcely able to hide his annoyance.

"That is the tenth time you've asked me that question. I must repeat: I am quite well."

"Oh, pardon my inquisitiveness. It has been a very long day, you know."

"I want you and Miss Thursdale to dine with me at eight this evening. I think I'll have a little surprise for you," she said mysteriously. Windomshire glared, and then managed to give a provisional acceptance. It all depended on the hour of leaving for the train. As he hurried off to find Anne he was groaning to himself: "How the deuce can I go to a dinner and run off again with Anne? I've got everything arranged. I can't let a beastly dinner interfere. I won't go, hang me if I do." He came upon Anne in the corner of the library—the most unfrequented corner.

"Well?" she questioned eagerly. He clasped her hands, beaming once more.

"I've seen him, dear. It's all right. My word, I've had no end of a busy day. The confounded fellow was out making calls on the congregation, as they say, and I had to pursue him from house to house, always missing him, by Jove."

"But you *did* find him?" anxiously.

"Of course. He will be at the church at nine to-

night—sharp. He understands that no one is to know about it. His fee is ten pounds—quite a bit for a chap like him. I found him calling upon a fellow who is about to die—a Mr. Grover. He sent out word I'd have to wait as the old gentleman was passing away. By Jove, do you know I was that intense that I sent in word that the old gentleman would have to wait a bit—I *couldn't*. The pastor came out and—well, it seems that the fee for helping a chap to get married is more substantial than what he gets for helping one to die. And, as luck would have it, I found a fellow who will act as one of the witnesses to the ceremony at this same house,—a Mr. Hooker, Anne. He came down on the train with us. Tall, dark, professional looking man. He was sitting on Mr. Grover's front steps when I got there. The other witness—must have two, you know—is the head-waiter in the dining-room here—”

“The—head-waiter?” she gasped.

“He's a very decent sort of chap, my dear—and, besides, we can't be choosers. Waiters are most discreet fellows, too. He's to get two pounds for his trouble. By Jove, I think I've done rather well. I'm sorry if you don't approve,” he lamented.

“But I do approve, Harry,” she cried bravely. “It's lovely!”

“Good! I knew you would. Now all we have to do is to slip away from here this evening, and— Oh, I say, hang it all! Mrs. Van Truder has asked me to dine with them this evening.”

“Isn't she running you a bit?” cried Anne, indig-

nantly. "She had you for breakfast and luncheon and now it's dinner. I daresay she'll have you for tea too."

"But I'm not going to her confounded dinner. That's settled. I can't do it, you know, and be on time for the wedding. Deuce take it, what does she take a fellow for? Hello, here comes the chap that Dauntless introduced to us this morning." Derby was approaching with a warm and ingratiating smile. "What's his name? Confound him."

"Mr. Derby, I think. Why can't they give us a moment's peace?" she pouted. Derby came up to them, his eyes sparkling with a fire which they could not and were not to understand. He had surveyed them from a distance for some time before deciding to ruthlessly, cruelly break in upon the tranquil situation.

"She's a pretty girl," he reflected, unconsciously going back to his college days, and quite forgetting his cloth—which, by the way, was a neat blue serge with a tender stripe. Consoling himself with the thought that he was doing it to accommodate an old friend, the good-looking Mr. Derby boldly entered the lists for the afternoon. He felt, somehow, that he had it in his power to make Mr. Windomshire quite jealous—and at the same time do nothing reprehensible. What he did succeed in doing, alas, was to make two young people needlessly miserable for a whole afternoon—bringing on grievous headaches and an attack of suppressed melancholia that savoured somewhat of actual madness.

True to his project, he laboured hard and skillfully for hours. Windomshire moved about in solitude, gnashing his teeth, while Derby unceremoniously whisked the dazed Anne off for pleasant walks or held her at bay in some secluded corner of the parlours. By dinner-time, encouraged by Joe's wild but cautious applause, he had driven Windomshire almost to distraction. A thing he did not know, however,—else his pride might have cringed perceptibly,—was that Anne Courtenay was growing to hate him as no one was ever hated before.

"Well," he said to the nervous Mr. Dauntless at seven o'clock that evening, having arrived at what he called the conclusion of his day's work, "I think I've done all that was expected, haven't I?"

"You've got him crazy, old boy. Look at him! It's the first minute he's had since half-past two. Say, what do you think of this cursed weather? It's raining again—and muddy! Great Scot, old man! it's knee deep, and we don't dare take a carriage to the church. One can't sneak worth a cent in a cab, you know. See you later! There's Eleanor waiting to speak to me. By George, I'm nervous. You *won't* fail us, old man?"

"I'll do my part, Joe," said Derby, smiling.

"Well, so long, if I don't see you before nine. You look out for old Mr. Van Truder, will you? See that he sneaks out properly. And—"

"Don't worry, old chap. Go to Miss Thursdale. She seems nervous."

CHAPTER VI

THE ROAD TO PARADISE

Night again—and again the mist and the drizzle; again the country lane, but without the warm clubhouse fire, the cheery lights, the highball, and the thumping motor car. Soggy, squashy mud instead of the clean tonneau; heavy, cruel wading through unknown by-ways in place of the thrilling rush to Fenlock. Not twenty-four hours had passed, and yet it seemed that ages lay between the joyous midnight and the sodden, heart-breaking eve that followed.

The guests at the Somerset kept close indoors,—that is, most of them did. It is with those who fared forth resolutely into the night that we have to do; the rest of the world is to be barred from any further connection with this little history. It is far out in the dreary country lane and not inside the warm hotel that we struggle to attain our end. First one, then another stealthy figure crept forth into the drizzle; before the big clock struck half-past eight, at least six respectable and supposedly sensible persons had mysteriously disappeared. Only one of our close acquaintances remained in the hotel,—Mrs. Van Truder. It was not to be long, however; before

she, too, would be adventuring forth in search of the unknown.

By this it may be readily understood that Mr. Van Truder had succeeded in escaping from beneath her very nose, as it were.

The little village church stood at the extreme end of the street,—dark, dismal, quite awe-inspiring on a night like this. A narrow lane stretched from the hotel to the sanctuary and beyond. There is nothing at hand to show whether it is a Methodist, a Presbyterian, or a Baptist church. As the two young women most vitally concerned in this tale were professedly high church, it is therefore no more than right that, in the darkness, it should be looked upon as an Episcopalian church.

Two stumbling figures, pressing close to each other in the shelter of a single wobbly umbrella, forged their uncertain way through the muddy lane. Except for the brief instants when the dull flicker of lightning came to their relief, they were in pitch darkness.

“Beastly dark, isn’t it?” said one of the figures.

“And beastly muddy too,” said the other, in a high, disconsolate treble. “Oh, dear, where are we?”

“I don’t know, but I feel as though we were about to step off of something every moment. Do you know, Anne, it’s extraordinary that I shouldn’t know how to light one of these confounded lanterns.”

“Try it again, Harry dear. I’ll hold the umbrella.”

“Oh, I see! By Jove, one has to open the thing, don’t you know. Ah, there we are! That’s better,”

he said, after he had succeeded in finally lighting the wick. He held the lantern up close to her face and they looked at each other for a moment. "Anne, I do love you!" he exclaimed. Then he kissed her. "That's the first time I've had a chance to kiss you in thirty-six hours."

They plodded onward, closer together than ever, coming at last to the little gate which opened into the churchyard. Before them stood the black little building with its steeple, but the windows were as dark as Erebus. They stopped in consternation. He looked at his watch.

"Confound him, he's not here!" growled Windomshire.

"Perhaps we are early," suggested Anne, feebly.

"It's a quarter to nine," he said. "I suppose there is nothing left for us to do but to wait. 'I'll look around a bit, dear. Perhaps the witnesses are here somewhere.'"

"Oo-oo-ooh! Don't leave me! she almost shrieked. "Look! There is a graveyard! I won't stay here alone!" They were standing at the foot of the rough wooden steps leading up to the church door.

"Pooh! Don't be afraid of tombstones," he scoffed; but he was conscious of a little shiver in his back. "They can't bite, you know. Besides, all churches have graveyards and crypts and—"

"This one has no crypt," she announced positively. "Goodness, I'm mud up to my knees and rain down to them. Why doesn't he come?"

"I'll give the signal; we had to arrange one, you know, for the sake of identity." He gave three loud, guttural coughs. A dog in the distance howled mournfully, as if in response. Anne crept closer to his side.

"It sounded as if some one were dying," she whispered. "Look, isn't that a light?—over there among the gravestones!" A light flickered for an instant in the wretched little graveyard and then disappeared as mysteriously as it came. "It's gone! How ghostly!"

"Extraordinary! I don't understand. By Jove, it's beginning to rain again. I'm sure to have tonsillitis. I feel it when I cough." He coughed again, louder than before.

Suddenly the steady beam of a dark lantern struck their faces squarely; a moment later the cadaverous Mr. Hooker was climbing over the graveyard fence.

"Am I late?" he asked, as he came forward.

"I say, turn that beastly light the other way," complained Windomshire, half blinded. "I thought no one but robbers carried dark lanterns."

"The darker the deed, the darker the lantern," said Mr. Hooker, genially. "Good-evening, madam. Are we the only ones here?" He was very matter-of-fact and business-like; Anne loathed him on the instant.

"We're all here but the minister and the other witness. I'll cough again—although it hurts me to do it."

He coughed thrice, but instead of a response in

kind, three sharp whistles came from the trees at the left.

"What's that?" he gasped. "Has he forgotten the signal?"

"Maybe he is trying to cough," said Hooker, "and can't do any better than wheeze. It's this rotten weather."

"No, it was a whistle. Good Heavens, Anne—it may be detectives."

"Detectives!" exclaimed Mr. Hooker, hoarsely. "Then this is no place for me. Excuse me, I'll just step around the corner." As he scurried off, he might have been heard to mutter to himself: "They've been hounding me ever since that job in the Cosgrove cemetery. Damn 'em, I wonder if they think I'm up here to rob the grave of one of these jays." From which it may be suspected that Mr. Hooker had been employed in the nefarious at one time or another.

"Detectives, Harry?" gasped Anne. "Why should there be detectives? We're not criminals."

"You can't tell what Mrs. Thursdale may have done when she discovered—Hello! There's a light down the road! 'Gad, I'll hide this lantern until we're sure." He promptly stuck the lantern inside his big raincoat and they were in darkness again. A hundred yards to the left a light bobbed about, reminding them of childhood's will-o'-the-wisp. Without a word Windomshire drew her around the church, stumbling over a discarded pew seat that stood against the wall. Groaning with pain, he urged her to crouch down with him behind the seat. All the

while he held the umbrella manfully over her devoted head.

Voices were heard, drawing nearer and nearer—one deep and cheery, the other high and querulous.

“It—it—oh, Harry, it’s that Mr. Derby!” she whispered. “I’d know his voice in a thousand.”

“The devil!” he whispered intensely, gripping her hand.

Mr. Derby was saying encouragingly: “There is the church, Mr. Van Truder. Brace up. We seem to be the first to arrive.”

“It’s much farther away than you think,” growled Mr. Van Truder. “I can’t see the lights in the window.”

“There are no lights yet. We are ahead of them. I’ll try the door.”

The young minister kicked the mud from his shoes as he went up the steps with the lantern. He tried the door vigorously, and then, holding the lantern high, surveyed the surroundings. Mr. Van Truder, bundled up like a motorman, stood below shivering—but with joy.

“This is a great night for an affair of this kind,” he quaked. “By George, I feel twenty years younger. I believe I could turn handsprings.”

“I wouldn’t if I were you. Don’t forget your somersault over that log back there, and your splendid headspin in the mud puddle. It’s past nine o’clock. Joe’s cousin was to be here at 8.45. Wonder what keeps him. Joe will be here himself in a jiffy.

Dear me, what a dreadful night they have chosen for a wedding!"

Windomshire whispered in horror to the girl beside him: "Good Lord, Anne, they're following us."

"Please, Harry," she whispered petulantly, "hold the umbrella still. The water from the rainspout is dripping down my back."

"By George, I wish Mrs. Van Truder could see me now," came valiantly from the old gentleman around the corner. "Say, whistle again." Derby gave three sharp, shrill whistles. In silence they waited a full minute for the response. There was not a sound except the dripping of the rain.

"I'm afraid something is wrong," said Derby. Just at that instant Windomshire, despite most heroic efforts to prevent the catastrophe, sneezed with a violence that shook his entire frame. "Sh! don't speak," hissed the startled minister. "We are being watched. That was unmistakably a sneeze."

"I can't see any one," whispered Mr. Van Truder, excitedly. "I see just as well in the dark as I do in the light, too."

"Some one is coming. See! There's a light down the road. Let's step out of sight just for a moment."

Windomshire sneezed again, as if to accelerate the movements of the two men.

"Hang it all!" he gurgled in despair. Mr. Derby had blinded his lantern and was hurrying off into the grove with his companion.

"I can't help laughing, Harry," whispered Anne, giggling softly. "You sneeze like an elephant."

"But an elephant has more sense than to sneeze as I do. I knew I'd take cold. Anne, they're after us. It's old Mrs. Van Truder's work. What are they up to?"

"Whatever it is, dear, they're just as much mystified as we are. Did you hear him whistle? It is a signal."

"I say, Anne, it's a beastly mess I've got you into," groaned he.

"Dear old Harry, it is but the beginning of the mess you're getting yourself into. I love this—every bit of it."

"You're ripping, Anne; that's what you are. I—Great Scotland! Here comes the head-waiter, but we don't dare show ourselves. Did you ever know such beastly luck?"

"There's another man too, away back there. And, look! Isn't that a light coming through the trees back of the gravestones? Good Heavens, Harry, we can't be married in a public thorough-fare. Everybody is walking with lanterns. It's awful."

"Let's go around to the rear of the church," he exclaimed suddenly. "Perhaps we can get our brains to work on a plan of action. But, look here, Anne, no matter who they are or what they want, I'm going to marry you to-night if I have to do it in the face of the entire crowd."

As they scurried off through the tall wet grass to a less exposed station, a solitary figure came haltingly through the little gate. It was the head-waiter, and,

as he carried no lantern, he was compelled to light matches now and then; after getting his bearings he would dart resolutely on for a dozen paces before lighting another. Stopping in front of the church door, he nervously tried to penetrate the gloom with an anxious gaze; then, suddenly bethinking, he gave three timid little coughs. Getting no immediate response, he growled aloud in his wrath:

“I’ve coughed my head off in front of every house between here and the hotel, and I’m gettin’ darned tired of it. I don’t like this business; and I never could stand for graveyards. Good Lord! what’s that?”

Three sharp whistles came to his alert ears, coming, it seemed, from the very heart of some grim old gravestone. A man strode boldly across the yard from the gate, his walk indicating that he was perfectly familiar with the lay of the land.

“Who coughed?” he demanded loudly. “Is there no one here? What the dickens does it mean? Joe Dauntless! Where are you? No fooling now; my wife’s worse, and I can’t stay here all night.” He whistled again, and the head-waiter coughed in a bewildered reply. “That’s queer. Nothing was said about coughing.”

“Hello!” called the head-waiter. “Is it you, sir?”

Joe Dauntless’s cousin held his lantern on high and finally discovered the waiter near the pile of cordwood, ready to run at a moment’s notice.

“Who are you?” demanded Mr. Carpenter.

"Gustave. But you ain't the man."

"I ain't, eh? Didn't you whistle a minute ago?"

"I ain't supposed to. I cough. Say, do you know if a wedding has taken place here? I am a witness."

"Oh, I see. He said he'd bring one. Are you alone?"

"I don't know. It feels like a crowd every time I cough. Are you the preacher?"

"No, I'm the bridegroom's cousin. We've got to get in through a window. I couldn't find my key. Would you mind giving me a leg?"

"A leg? Nothing was said about legs," said the waiter, moving away. Carpenter laughed.

"I mean a boost up to the window."

"Oh! Sure."

"There's one in the rear I can smash. We'll get inside and light up. I can open the door from that side, too. Come on—follow me." They turned the corner and followed the path so lately taken by Windomshire and Anne. As they came to the back of the church they were startled and not a little alarmed by the sound of sudden scurrying and a well-defined imprecation, but it was too dark for them to distinguish any one. While they were trying to effect an entrance through one of the windows, other mystified participants in the night's affairs were looking on from secret and divers hiding-places. Far out in the little grove Derby and his old companion watched the operations of the church-breakers, the sickly glare of Carpenter's lantern as it stood upon

the edge of the rain barrel affording an unholy light for the occasion. Windomshire and Anne, crouching behind a stack of old benches, looked on in amazement. Mr. Hooker, whose conscience was none too easy, doubtless for excellent reasons, peered forth from behind a tall tombstone. He had arrived at the conclusion that he was being hounded down as a body-snatcher.

"This is a devil of a mess," he muttered dolefully. "If they catch me in this graveyard, I'll have a hard time proving an alibi. What an idiot I was to get into this thing! I guess I'll get out of it. He's got plenty of witnesses and I've got his ten dollars." He began sneaking off toward the extreme west end of the graveyard, bent on finding the road to town. "Holy smoke!" stopping short. "Another bunch of them coming! I'm surrounded!" He dropped down behind a weed-covered mound and glared straight ahead. Almost directly in his path a lantern wobbled and reeled slowly, finally bringing its bearer to the fence between the burying-ground and the churchyard. A man carried the light and half carried the form of a woman besides.

"Brace up, Nell dear," Mr. Hooker heard the newcomer say as tenderly as his exertions would allow. "The worst is over. Here's the church. Good Heavens, just think of being lost in a graveyard!"

"And climbing four fences and a tree," moaned Eleanor Thursdale. They had come up through the graveyard by mistake.

"It wasn't a tree; it was a fence post. Great Scot! There's no light in the church. What's up? Wait here, dear, and I'll investigate."

"Alone? Never!" she cried. They climbed their fifth fence, notwithstanding the fact that a gate was near at hand.

"This is an awful pickle I've got you into. You ought to hate me—" he was groaning, but she checked him nobly.

"Hush, Joe, I *love* it," she cried.

"You just wait and see how happy I'll make you for this." He was about to kiss her rapturously, but the act was stayed by the sound of a shrill whistle, thrice given. "There's Jim Carpenter and Derby," he exclaimed, and whistled in response. A moment later Derby strolled up from the grove, followed by the chattering Mr. Van Truder.

"That you, Joe?"

"Hello, Darb. Good! Where's Jim?" Some one whistled sharply off to the left, and then Jim Carpenter came hurrying up, the head-waiter close behind.

"Hello, Joe. Say, has either of you been coughing?" demanded Carpenter, his hair ready to stand on end.

"I should say not," said Joe. "I've scarcely been breathing."

"Then some ghost is having a hemorrhage," said the head-waiter, dismally. "Hello, Mr. Dauntless, are you a witness too?"

"Say, Joe," said his cousin, quickly, "there's some-

thing strange going on. The whole place is full of people. I went back there to open a window and at least two men coughed—one of 'em sneezed. We're being watched. This man says he heard a woman back there, and I saw a funny kind of light in the graveyard."

"Hang 'em!" growled Joe. "We can't stop now. Open up the church, Jim."

"Can't. Lost my key. Is this Miss Thursdale? Glad to meet you. The window's the only way and they're surely watching back there."

"Mamma has sent the officers after us," wailed Eleanor.

"Let's go home," said the waiter. "I didn't agree to stay out all night."

"Agree? Aha, I see. You are a spy!" cried Joe.

"A spy? I guess not. I'm a witness."

"It's the same thing," cackled Mr. Van Truder. "You're a spy witness."

"Joe, isn't this fellow your witness?" demanded Carpenter.

"I should say not. Mr. Van Truder is mine."

"By George, I don't understand—"

"Never mind, Jim, break into the church and let's have it over with. It's going to rain again."

"Oh, I'm so tired," moaned the poor bride, mud-spattered, wet, and very far from being the spick and span young woman that fashionable society knew and loved.

"By Jove!" came suddenly from the darkness,

startling the entire party—a masculine voice full of surprise and—yes, consternation. Then there strode into the circle of light a tall figure in a shimmering mackintosh, closely followed by a young, resolute woman.

“Windomshire!” gasped Dauntless, leaping in front of Eleanor, prepared to defend her with his life.

“Miss Courtenay, too,” murmured Eleanor, pecking under his arm.

“Yes, by Jove,” announced the harassed Englishman, at bay,—“Windomshire and Miss Courtenay.” There was a long silence—a tableau, in fact. “Well, why doesn’t some one say something? You’ve got us, don’t you know.”

Eleanor Thursdale was the first to find words. She was faint with humiliation, but strong with the new resolve. Coming forth from behind Dauntless, she presented herself before the man her mother had chosen.

“So you have found me out, Mr. Windomshire,” she said pleadingly, a wry little smile on her lips. “You know all about it?”

“I—er—by Jove, this is quite beyond me. Found you out? My word, you don’t mean to say—”

“I say, old man,” said Dauntless, manfully, “let me explain. We’ve always loved each other. It isn’t that she—”

“Hang it all, man, I knew that,” expostulated Windomshire. “It was a mistake all around. I love Anne, don’t you know. There’s no real harm done, I’m sure. But what puzzles me is this: why does Miss

Thursdale persist in pursuing us if she loves you and doesn't care to marry me? "

"The deuce! I like that," cried Dauntless. "You'd better begin by asking questions at home."

"I take it," interposed Mr. Derby, with rare tact and discernment, "that both of you expect to be married, but not to each other as originally planned." Both Eleanor and Windomshire signified eager affirmation in more ways than one. "Then it seems to me a simple case of coincidence, which may be explained later on. Why discuss it now? I am in reality a minister, Miss Courtenay, and I am here to unite Miss Thursdale and Mr. Dauntless in the holy bonds of matrimony. I trust we may expect no interference on the part of Mr. Windomshire? "

"Good Lord! No!" almost shouted Windomshire, clasping Anne's hand in a mighty grasp. "That's what we are here for ourselves—to be married—but the damned parson has deceived us."

Jim Carpenter came out of his trance at this. "Say, are you the fellow Rev. Smith was to marry? Well, he won't be here. There's a surprise pound party at his house and the whole town is there. He couldn't leave to save his soul. It's the way he gets his living."

"Oh, Anne!" cried Windomshire, in real despair.

Anne slipped into the breach with rare old English fortitude. She addressed herself sweetly to Mr. Derby.

"Mr. Derby, do you remember saying this afternoon that you'd do anything in the world for me? "

Mr. Derby blushed and looked most unworthy of his calling, but managed to say that he *would* do anything in the world for her. "Then, please take the place of the minister who couldn't come."

"Good!" cried Dauntless, almost dancing.

"I will, Miss Courtenay," said Derby. Windomshire grasped him by the hand, speechless with joy and relief.

"I don't understand all this," complained Mr. Van Truder, vainly trying to see the excited, jubilant quartette. He only knew that they were all talking at once, suddenly without restraint. "I wish my wife were here; she'd understand."

Jim Carpenter at last came to his senses and, dragging the head-waiter after him, sped to the rear of the church. A few minutes later lights flashed in the windows and then the front door swung open. Carpenter and Gustave stood smiling upon the threshold.

"Enter!" called out the former. As the group quickly passed through the doorway, a long figure climbed down from the fence hard by and ventured up to the portal. It was Mr. Hooker, his face the picture of bewilderment.

"Well, this beats me!" he ejaculated, leaning against the door jamb; none of those at the altar heard his remark. He stood there listening until the last words of the service which united two couples were uttered. Then he turned sorrowfully away and started across the yard. The sound of a wedding march played upon the wheezy cabinet organ by Jim

Carpenter followed him into the gloom; above the gasp of the organ was lifted the unmistakable chatter of joyous voices.

As he passed through the gate a great vehicle rolled up and stopped. It was drawn by two steaming horses, and the waggon lanterns told him that it was the Somerset Hotel 'bus. "I'll ride back with 'em," he thought comfortably.

Some one climbed down from the rear of the 'bus, assisted by two young men in brass buttons. Mr. Hooker made way for a corpulent, puffing old lady. She stopped in front of him and demanded in hot, strident tones:

"Where is my husband?"

"Your husband?" repeated Mr. Hooker, politely. "Madam, you can search me. There's a whole churchful of husbands up there."

"You—you—" she sputtered. "Am I too late? Support me, you fools," she cried to the two bell-boys. They hurried across the churchyard, Mr. Hooker following. At the doorway she stopped, glaring hard at the well-lighted interior. "Mr. Van Truder! Mr. Van Truder!" she called out angrily, but her joyful other half did not hear her. He was trying at that moment to organise the company into a wedding procession.

"Say," said Mr. Hooker, "maybe you'd better cough three times."

THE PURPLE PARASOL



THE PURPLE PARASOL

Young Rossiter did not like the task. The more he thought of it as he whirled northward on the Empire State Express the more distasteful it seemed to grow.

"Hang it all," he thought, throwing down his magazine in disgust, "it's like police work. And heaven knows I haven't wanted to be a cop since we lived in Newark twenty years ago. Why the dickens did old Wharton marry her? He's an old ass, and he's getting just what he might have expected. She's twenty-five and beautiful; he's seventy and a sight. I've a notion to chuck the whole affair and go back to the simple but virtuous Tenderloin. It's not my sort, that's all, and I was an idiot for mixing in it. The firm served me a shabby trick when it sent me out to work up this case for Wharton. It's a regular Peeping Tom job, and I don't like it."

It will require but few words to explain Sam Rossiter's presence in the north-bound Empire Express, but it would take volumes to express his feelings on the subject in general. Back in New York there lived Godfrey Wharton, millionaire and

septuagenarian. For two years he had been husband to one of the prettiest, gayest young women in the city, and in the latter days of this responsibility he was not a happy man. His wife had fallen desperately, even conspicuously, in love with Everett Havens, the new leading man at one of the fashionable playhouses. The affair had been going on for weeks, and it had at last become the talk of the town. By "the town" is meant that vague, expansive thing known as the "Four Hundred." Sam Rossiter, two years out of Yale, was an attachment to, but not a component part of, the Four Hundred. The Whartons were of the inner circle.

Young Rossiter was ambitious. He was, besides, keen, aggressive, and determined to make well for himself. Entering the great law offices of Grover & Dickhut immediately after leaving college, he devoted himself assiduously to the career in prospect. He began by making its foundation as substantial as brains and energy would permit. So earnest, so successful was he that Grover & Dickhut regarded him as the most promising young man in New York. They predicted a great future for him, no small part of which was the ultimate alteration of an office shingle, the name of Rossiter going up in gilt, after that of Dickhut. And, above all, Rossiter was a handsome, likable chap. Tall; fair, sunny-hearted, well groomed, he was a fellow that both sexes liked without much effort.

The Wharton trouble was bound to prove startling any way one looked at it. The prominence of the



HELEN

family, the baldness of its skeleton, and the gleeful eagerness with which it danced into full view left but little for meddlers to covet. A crash was inevitable; it was the *clash* that Grover & Dickhut were trying to avert. Old Wharton, worn to a slimmer frazzle than he had ever been before his luckless marriage, was determined to divorce his insolent younger half. It was to be done with as little noise as possible, more for his own sake than for hers. Wharton was proud in, not of, his weakness.

It became necessary to "shadow" the fair débutante into matrimony. After weeks of indecision Mr. Wharton finally arose and swore in accents terrible that she was going too far to be called back. He determined to push, not to pull, on the reins. Grover & Dickhut were commanded to get the "evidence"; he would pay. When he burst in upon them and cried in his cracked treble that "the devil's to pay," he did not mean to cast any aspersion upon the profession in general or particular. He was annoyed.

"She's going away next week," he exclaimed, as if the lawyers were to blame for it.

"Well, and what of it?" asked Mr. Grover blandly.

"Up into the mountains," went on Mr. Wharton triumphantly.

"Is it against the law?" smiled the old lawyer.

"Confound the law! I don't object to her going up into the mountains for a rest, but——"

"It's much too hot in town for her, I fancy."

"How's that?" querulously. "But I've just heard

that that scoundrel Havens is going to the mountains also."

"The same mountain?"

"Certainly. I have absolute proof of it. Now, something has to be done!"

And so it was that the promising young lawyer, Samuel W. Rossiter, Jr., was sent northward into the Adirondacks one hot summer day with instructions to be tactful but thorough. He had never seen Mrs. Wharton, nor had he seen Havens. There was no time to look up these rather important details, for he was off to intercept her at the little station from which one drove by coach to the quiet summer hotel among the clouds. She was starting the same afternoon. He found himself wondering whether this petted butterfly of fashion had ever seen him, and, seeing him, had been sufficiently interested to inquire, "Who is that tall fellow with the light hair?" It would be difficult to perform the duties assigned to him if either she or Havens knew him for what he was. His pride would have been deeply wounded if he had known that Grover & Dickhut recommended him to Wharton as "obscure."

"They say she is a howling beauty as well as a swell," reflected Rossiter, as the miles and minutes went swinging by. "And that's something to be thankful for. One likes novelty, especially if it's feminine. Well, I'm out for the sole purpose of saving a million or so for old Wharton, and to save as much of her reputation as I can besides. With the proof in hand the old duffer can scare her out of any

claim against his bank account, and she shall have the absolute promise of 'no exposure' in return. Isn't it lovely? Well, here's Albany. Now for the dinky road up to Fossingford Station. I have an hour's wait here. She's coming on the afternoon train and gets to Fossingford at eleven-ten to-night. That's a dickens of a time for a young woman to be arriving anywhere, to say nothing of Fossingford."

Loafing about the depot at Albany, Rossiter kept a close lookout for Mrs. Wharton as he pictured her from the description he carried in his mind's eye. Her venerable husband informed him that she was sure to wear a white shirt-waist, a gray skirt, and a Knox sailor hat, because her maid had told him so in a huff. But he was to identify her chiefly by means of a handsome and oddly trimmed parasol of deep purple. Wharton had every reason to suspect that it was a present from Havens, and therefore to be carried more for sentiment than protection.

A telegram awaited him at Fossingford Station. Fossingford was so small and unsophisticated that the arrival of a telegraphic message that did not relate to the movement of railroad trains was an "occasion." Everybody in town knew that a message had come for Samuel Rossiter, and everybody was at the depot to see that he got it. The station agent had inquired at the "eating-house" for the gentleman, and that was enough. With the eyes of a Fossingford score or two upon him, Rossiter read the despatch from Grover & Dickhut.

"Too bad, ain't it?" asked the agent, compas-

sionately regarding the newcomer. Evidently the contents were supposed to be disappointing.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Rossiter easily. But just the same he was troubled in mind as he walked over and sat down upon his steamer trunk in the shade of the building. The telegram read:

"She left New York five-thirty this evening. Stops over night Albany. Fossingford to-morrow morning. Watch trains. Purple parasol. Sailor hat. Gray travelling suit.

"G. and D."

It meant that he would be obliged to stay in Fossingford all night—but where? A general but comprehensive glance did not reveal anything that looked like a hotel. He thought of going back to Albany for the night, but it suddenly occurred to him that she might not stop in that city, after all. Pulling his wits together, he saw things with a new clearness of vision. Ostensibly she had announced her intention to spend the month at Eagle Nest, an obscure but delightful hotel in the hills; but did that really mean that she would go there? It was doubtless a ruse to throw the husband off the track. There were scores of places in the mountains, and it was more than probable that she would give Eagle Nest a wide berth. Rossiter patted his bump of perceptiveness and smiled serenely until he came plump up against the realization that she might not come by way of Fossingford at all, or, in any event, she might

go whisking through to some station farther north. His speculations came to an end in the shape of a distressing resolution. He would remain in Fossingford and watch the trains go by!

After he had dashed through several early evening trains, the cheerful, philosophical smile of courage left his face and trouble stared from his eyes. He saw awkward prospects ahead. Suppose she were to pass through on one of the late night trains! He could not rush through the sleepers, even though the trains stopped in Fossingford for water. Besides, she could not be identified by means of a gray suit, a sailor hat, and a purple parasol if they were tucked away in the berth. At eleven o'clock he was pacing the little depot platform, waiting for the eleven-ten train, the last he was to inspect for the night. He had eaten a scanty meal at the restaurant nearby, and was still mad about it. The station agent slept soundly at his post, and all the rest of the town had gone to bed.

The train pulled in and out again, leaving him at the far end of the platform, mopping his harassed brow. He had visited the chair-cars and had seen no one answering the description. A half-dozen passengers huddled off and wandered away in the darkness.

"I'll bet my head she's in one of those sleepers," he groaned, as he watched the lights on the rear coach fade away into the night. "It's all off till to-morrow, that's settled. My only hope is that she really stopped in Albany. There's a train through

here at three in the morning; but I'm not detective enough to unravel the mystery of any woman's berth. Now, where the deuce am *I* to sleep?"

As he looked about dismally, disconsolately, his hands deep in his pockets, his straw hat pulled low over his sleepy eyes, the station agent came up to him with a knowing grin on his face.

"'Scuse me, boss, but she's come," he said, winking.

"She? Who?"

"Her. The young lady. Sure! She's lookin' fer you over in the waitin'-room. You mus' 'a' missed her when she got off—thought she wasn't comin' up till to-morrer. Mus' 'a' changed her mind. That's a woming all over, ain't it?"

Rossiter felt himself turn hot and cold. His head began to whirl and his courage went fluttering away. Here was a queer complication. The quarry hunting for the sleuth, instead of the reverse. He fanned himself with his hat for one brief, uncertain moment, dazed beyond belief. Then he resolutely strode over to face the situation, trusting to luck to keep him from blundering his game into her hands. Just as he was about to put his foot upon the lamp-lit door-sill the solution struck him like a blow. She was expecting Havens to meet her!

There was but one woman in the room, and she was approaching the door with evident impatience as he entered. Both stopped short, she with a look of surprise, which changed to annoyance and then crept into an nervous, apologetic little smile; he with

an unsuppressed ejaculation. She wore a gray skirt, a white waist, and a sailor hat, and she was surpassingly good to look at even in the trying light from the overhead lamp. Instinctively his eye swept over her. She carried on her arm the light gray jacket, and in one hand was the tightly rolled parasol of—he impertinently craned his neck to see—of purple! Mr. Rossiter was face to face with the woman he was to dog for a month, and he was flabbergasted. Even as he stopped, puzzled, before her, contemplating retreat, she spoke to him.

“Did that man send you to me?” she asked nervously, looking through the door beyond and then through a window at his right, quite puzzled, he could see.

“He did, and I was sure he was mistaken. I knew of no one in this Godforsaken place who could be asking for me,” said he, collecting his wits carefully and herding them into that one sentence. “But perhaps I can help you. Will you tell me whom I am to look for?”

“It is strange he is not here,” she said a little breathlessly. “I wired him just what train to expect me on.”

“Your husband?” ventured he admirably.

“Oh, dear, no!” said she quickly.

“I wish she’d wired me what train to expect her on,” thought he grimly. “She doesn’t know me. That’s good. She was expecting Havens and he’s missed connections somehow,” shot rapidly through his brain. At the same time he was thinking of her

as the prettiest woman he had seen in all his life. Then aloud: "I'll look on the platform. Maybe he's lost in this great city. What name shall I call out?"

"Please don't call very loudly. You'll wake the dead," she said, with a pathetic smile. "It's awfully good of you. He may come at any minute, you know. His name is—is"—she hesitated for a second, and then went on determinedly—"Dudley. Tall, dark man. I don't know how I shall thank you. It's so very awkward."

Rossiter darted from her glorious but perplexed presence. He had never seen Havens, but he was sure he could recognize an actor if he saw him in Fossingford. And he would call him Dudley, too. It would be wise. The search was fruitless. The only tall, dark object he saw was the mailcrane at the edge of the platform, but he facetiously asked if its name was Dudley. Receiving no answer, he turned back to cast additional woe into the heart of the pretty intriguer. She was standing in the door, despair in her eyes. Somehow he was pleased because he had not found the wretch. She was so fair to look upon and so appealing in her distress.

"You couldn't find him? What am I to do? Oh, isn't it awful? He promised to be here."

"Perhaps he's at a hotel."

"In Fossingford?" in deep disgust. "There's no hotel here. He was to drive me to the home of a friend out in the country." Rossiter leaned against the wall suddenly. There was a long silence. He

could not find his tongue, but his eyes were burning deep into the plaintive blue ones that looked up into his face.

"I'll ask the agent," he said at last.

"Ask him what?" she cried anxiously.

"If he's been here. No, I'll ask if there's a place where you can sleep to-night. Mr. Dudley will surely turn up to-morrow."

"But I couldn't sleep a wink. I feel like crying my eyes out," she wailed.

"Don't do that!" exclaimed he, in alarm. "I'll take another look outside."

"Please don't. He is not here. Will you please tell me what I am to do?"—very much as if it was his business to provide for her in the hour of need.

Rossiter promptly awoke the agent and asked him where a room could be procured for the lady. Doxie's boarding-house was the only place, according to the agent, and it was full to overflowing. Besides, they would not "take in" strange women.

"She can sleep here in the waiting-room," suggested the agent. "They'll let you sleep in the parlor over at Doxie's, mister—maybe."

Rossiter did not have the heart to tell her all that the agent said. He merely announced that there was no hotel except the depot waiting-room.

"By the way, does Mr. Dudley live out in the country?" he asked insidiously. She flushed and then looked at him narrowly.

"No. He's visiting his uncle up here."

"Funny he missed you."

"It's terribly annoying," she said coldly. Then she walked away from him as if suddenly conscious that she should not be conversing with a good-looking stranger as such a time and place and under such peculiar circumstances. He withdrew to the platform and his own reflections.

"He's an infernal cad for not meeting her," he found himself saying, her pretty, distressed face still before him. "I don't care a rap whether she's doing right or wrong—she's game. Still, she's a blamed little fool to be travelling up here on such an outlandish train. So he's visiting an uncle, eh? Then the chances are they're not going to Eagle Nest. Lucky I waited here—I'd have lost them entirely if I'd gone back to Albany. But where the deuce is she to sleep till morn—" He heard rapid footsteps behind him and turned to distinguish Mrs. Wharton as she approached dimly but gracefully. The air seemed full of her.

"Oh, Mr.—Mr.—" she was saying eagerly.

"Rollins."

"Isn't there a later train, Mr. Rollins?"

"I'll ask the agent."

"There's the flyer at three-thirty A. M.," responded the sleepy agent a minute later.

"I'll just sit up and wait for it," she said coolly. "He has got the trains confused."

"Good heavens! Till three-thirty?"

"But my dear Mr. Rollins, you won't be obliged to sit up, you know. You're not expecting any one, are you?"

"N-no, of course not."

"By the way, why *are* you staying up?" He was sure he detected alarm in the question. She was suspecting him!

"I have nowhere to go, Miss—Mrs.—er—" She merely smiled and he said something under his breath. "I'm waiting for the eight o'clock train."

"How lovely! What time will the three-thirty train get here, agent?"

"At half-past three, I reckon. But she don't stop here!"

"Oh, goodness! Can't you flag it—her, I mean?"

"What's the use?" asked Rossiter. "He's not coming on it, is he?"

"That's so. He's coming in a buggy. You needn't mind flagging her, agent."

"Well, say, I'd like to lock up the place," grumbled the agent. "There's no more trains to-night but Number Seventeen, and she don't even whistle here. I can't set up here all night."

"Oh, you wouldn't lock me out in the night, would you?" she cried in such pretty despair that he faltered.

"I got to git home to my wife. She's——"

"That's all right, agent," broke in Rossiter hastily. "I'll take your place as agent. Leave the doors open and I'll go on watch. I have to stay up anyway."

There was a long silence. He did not know whether she was freezing or warming toward him, because he dared not look into her eyes.

"I don't know who you are," she said distinctly but plaintively. It was very dark out there on the platform and the night air was growing cold.

"It is the misfortune of obscurity," he said mockingly. "I am a most humble wayfarer on his way to the high hills. If it will make you feel any more comfortable, madam, I will say that I don't know who you are. So, you see, we are in the same boat. You are waiting for a man and I am waiting for daylight. I sincerely trust you may not have as long to wait as I. Believe me, I regard myself as a gentleman. You are quite as safe with me as you will be with the agent, or with Mr.—Mr. Dudley, for that matter."

"You may go home to your wife, Mr. Agent," she said promptly. "Mr. Rollins will let the trains through, I'm sure."

The agent stalked away in the night and the diminutive station was left to the mercy of the wayfarers.

"And now, Mr. Rollins, you may go over in that corner and stretch out on the bench. It will be springless, I know, but I fancy you can sleep. I will call you for the—for breakfast."

"I'm hanged if you do. On the contrary, I'm going to do my best to fix a comfortable place for you to take a nap. I'll call you when Mr. Dudley comes."

"It's most provoking of him," she said, as he began rummaging through his steamer trunk. "What are you doing?"

"Hunting out something to make over into a mattress. You don't mind napping on my clothes, do you? Here's a soft suit of flannels, a heavy suit of cheviot, a dress suit, a spring coat, and a raincoat. I can rig up a downy couch in no time if——"

"Ridiculous! Do you imagine that I'm going to sleep on your best clothes? I'm going to sit up."

"You'll have to do as I say, madam, or be turned out of the hotel," said he, with an infectious grin.

"But I insist upon your lying down. You have no reason for doing this for me. Besides, I'm going to sit up. Good-night!"

"You are tired and ready to cry," he said, calmly going on with his preparations. She stood off defiantly and watched him pile his best clothes into a rather comfortable-looking heap on one of the long benches. "Now, if you don't mind, I'll make a pillow of these negligée shirts. They're soft, you know."

"Stop! I refuse to accept your——" she was protesting.

"Do you want me to leave you here all alone?" he demanded. "With the country full of tramps and——"

"Don't! It's cowardly of you to frighten me. They say the railroads are swarming with tramps, too. Won't you please go and see if Mr. Dudley is anywhere in sight?"

"It was mean of me, I confess. Please lie down. It's getting cold. Pull this raincoat over yourself. I'll walk out and——"

"Oh, but you are a determined person. And very

foolish, too. Why should you lose a lot of sleep just for me when——?”

“There is no reason why two men should fail you to-night, Mrs.—Miss——”

“Miss Dering,” she said, humbled.

“When you choose to retire, Miss Dering, you will find your room quite ready, he said with fine gallantry, bowing low as he stood in the doorway. “I will be just outside on the platform, so don’t be uneasy.”

He quickly faded into the night, leaving her standing there, petulant, furious, yet with admiration in her eyes. Ten minutes later he heard her call. She was sitting on the edge of the improvised couch, smiling sweetly, even timidly.

“It must be cold out there. You must wear this.”

She came toward him, the raincoat in one hand, the purple parasol in the other. He took the parasol only and departed without a word. She gasped and would have called after him, but there was no use. With a perplexed frown and smile she went slowly, dubiously toward the folded bed.

Rossiter smoked three cigars and walked two miles up and down the platform, swinging the parasol absent-mindedly, before he ventured to look inside the room again. In that time he had asked and answered many questions in his mind. He saw that it would be necessary to change his plans if he was to watch her successfully. She evidently gave out Eagle Nest to blind her husband. Somehow he was

forgetting that the task before him was disagreeable and undignified. What troubled him most was how to follow them if Havens—or Dudley—put in an appearance for the three-thirty train. He began to curse Everett Havens softly but potently.

When he looked into the waiting-room she was sound asleep on the bench. It delighted him to see that she had taken him at his word and was lying upon his clothes. Cautiously he took a seat on the door-sill. The night was as still as death and as lonesome as the grave. For half an hour he sat gazing upon the tired, pretty face and the lithe young figure of the sleeper. He found himself dreaming, although he was wide awake—never more so. It occurred to him that he would be immensely pleased to hear that Havens's reason for failing her was due to an accident in which he had been killed.

"Those clothes will have to be pressed the first thing to-morrow," he said to himself, but without a trace of annoyance. "Hang it all, she doesn't look like that sort of woman," his mind switched. "But just think of being tied up to an old crocodile like Wharton! Gee! One oughtn't to blame her!"

Then he went forth into the night once more and listened for the sound of buggy wheels. It was almost time for the arrival of the belated man from the country, and he was beginning to pray that he would not appear at all. It came to his mind that he should advise her to return to New York in the morning. At last his watch told him that the train was due to pass in five minutes. And still no buggy!

Good! He felt an exhilaration that threatened to break into song.

Softly he stole back into the waiting-room, prepared to awaken her before the train shot by. Something told him that the rumble and roar would terrify her if she were asleep. Going quite close to her he bent forward and looked long and sadly upon the perfect face. Her hair was somewhat disarranged, her hat had a very hopeless tilt, her lashes swept low over the smooth cheek, but there was an almost imperceptible choke in her breathing. In her small white hand she clasped a handkerchief tightly, and—yes, he was sure of it—there were tear-stains beneath her lashes. There came to him the faint sob which lingers long in the breath of one who has cried herself to sleep. The spy passed his hand over his brow, sighed, shook his head and turned away irresolutely. He remembered that she was waiting for a man who was not her husband.

Far down the track a bright star came shooting toward Fossingford. He knew it to be the headlight of the flyer. With a breath of relief he saw that he was the only human being on the platform. Havens had failed again. This time he approached the recumbent one determinedly. She was awake the instant he touched her shoulder.

“Oh,” she murmured, sitting erect and looking about, bewildered. “Is it—has he—oh, you are still here? Has he come?”

“No, Miss Dering, he is not here,” and added,

under his breath, "damn him!" Then aloud, "The train is coming."

"And he didn't come?" she almost wailed.

"I fancy you'd better try to sleep until morning. There's nothing to stay awake for," although it came with a pang.

"Absolutely nothing," she murmured, and his pride took a respectful tumble. As she began to rearrange her hair, rather clumsily spoiling a charming effect, he remonstrated.

"Don't bother about your hair." She looked at him in wonder for an instant, a little smile finally creeping to her lips. He felt that she understood something. "Maybe he'll come after all," he added quickly.

"What are you doing with my parasol?" she asked sleepily.

"I'm carrying it to establish your identity with Dudley if he happens to come. He'll recognize the purple parasol, you know."

"Oh, I see," she said dubiously. "He gave it to me for a birthday present."

"I knew it," he muttered.

"What?"

"I mean I knew he'd recognize it," he explained.

The flyer shot through Fossingford at that juncture, a long line of roaring shadows. There was silence between them until the rumble was lost in the distance.

"If you don't mind, I'd like to go out on the platform for awhile," she said finally, resignation in her

eyes. "Perhaps he's out there, wondering why the train didn't stop."

"It's cold out there. Just slip into my coat, Miss Dering." He held the raincoat for her, and she mechanically slipped her arms into the sleeves. She shivered, but smiled sweetly up at him.

"Thank you, Mr. Rollins, you are very thoughtful and very kind to me."

They walked out into the darkness. After a turn or two in silence she took the arm he proffered. He admired the bravery with which she was trying to convince him that she was not so bitterly disappointed. When she finally spoke her voice was soft and cool, just as a woman's always is before the break.

"He was to have taken me to his uncle's house, six miles up in the country. His aunt and a young lady from the South, with Mr. Dudley and me, are to go to Eagle Nest to-morrow for a month."

"How very odd," he said with well-assumed surprise. "I, too, am going to Eagle Nest for a month or so."

She stopped stock-still, and he could feel that she was staring at him hardly.

"You are going there?" she half whispered.

"They say it is a quiet, restful place," he said. "One reaches it by stage overland, I believe." She was strangely silent during the remainder of the walk. Somehow he felt amazingly sorry for her. "I hope I may see something of you while we are there," he said at last.

"I imagine I couldn't help it if I were to try,"

she said. They were in the path of the light from the window, and he saw the strange little smile on her face. "I think I'll lie down again. Won't you find a place to sleep, Mr. Rollins? I can't bear the thought of depriving you—"

"I am the slave of your darkness," he said gravely.

She left him, and he lit another cigar. Daylight came at last to break up his thoughts, and then his tired eyes began to look for the man and buggy. Fatigued and weary, he sat upon his steamer trunk, his back to the wall. There he fell sound asleep.

He was awakened by some one shaking him gently by the shoulder.

"You are a very sound sleeper, Mr. Rollins," said a familiar voice, but it was gay and sprightly. He looked up blankly, and it was a full half-minute before he could get his bearings.

A young woman with a purple parasol stood beside him, laughing merrily, and at her side was a tall, dark, very good-looking young man.

"I couldn't go without saying good-by to you, Mr. Rollins, and thanking you again for the care you have taken of me," she was saying. He finally saw the little gloved hand that was extended toward him. Her companion was carrying her jacket and the little travelling-bag.

"Oh—er—good-by, and don't mention it," he stammered, struggling to his feet. "Was I asleep?"

"Asleep at your post, sir. Mr. Dudley—oh, this is Mr. Dudley, Mr. Rollins—came in ten minutes ago and found—us—both—asleep."

"Isn't it lucky Mr. Dudley happens to be an honest man?" said Rossiter, in a manner so strange that the smile froze on the face of the other man. The unhappy barrister caught the quick glance that passed between them, and was vaguely convinced that they had been discussing him while he slept. Something whispered to him that they had guessed the nature of his business.

"My telegram was not delivered to him until this morning. Wasn't it provoking?" she was saying.

"What time is it now?" asked Rossiter.

"Half-past seven," responded Dudley rather sharply. His black eyes were fastened steadily upon those of the questioner. "Mr. Van Haltford's man came in and got Miss Dering's telegram yesterday, but it was not delivered to me until a neighbor came to the house with both the message and messenger in charge. Joseph had drunk all the whisky in Fossingford.

"Then there's no chance for me to get a drink, I suppose," said Rossiter with a wry smile.

"Do you need one?" asked Miss Dering saucily.

"I have a headache."

"A pick-me-up is what you want," said Dudley coldly.

"My dear sir, I haven't been drunk," remonstrated Rossiter sharply. His hearers laughed and he turned red but cold with resentment.

"See, Mr. Rollins, I have smoothed out your clothes and folded them," she said, pointing to her one-time couch. "I couldn't pack them in your

trunk because you were sitting on it. Shall I help you now?"

"No, I thank you," he said ungraciously. "I can toss 'em in any old way."

He set about doing it without another word. His companions stood over near the window and conversed earnestly in words too low for him to distinguish. From the corner of his eye he could see that Dudley's face was hard and uncompromising, while hers was eager and imploring. The man was stubbornly objecting to something, and she was just as decided in an opposite direction.

"He's finding fault and she's trying to square it with him. Oh, my beauties, you'll have a hard time to shake off one Samuel Rossiter. They're suspicious—or he is, at least. Some one has tipped me off to them, I fancy."

"I'm sorry they are so badly mussed, Mr. Rollins, but they did make a very comfortable bed," she said, walking over to him. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were gleaming. "You are going to Eagle Nest to-day?"

"Just as soon as I can get a conveyance. There is a stage-coach at nine, Miss Dering."

"We will have room for you on our break," she said simply. Her eyes met his bravely and then wavered. Rossiter's heart gave a mighty leap.

"Permit me to second Miss Dering's invitation," said Dudley, coming over. The suggestion of a frown on his face made Rossiter only too eager to accept the unexpected invitation. "My aunt and

Miss Croizer are outside with the coachman. You can have your luggage sent over in the stage. It is fourteen miles by road, so we should be under way, Mr. Rollins."

As Rossiter followed them across the platform he was saying to himself:

"Well, the game's on. Here's where I begin to earn my salary. I'll hang out my sign when I get back to New York: 'Police Spying. Satisfaction guaranteed. References given.' Hang it all, I hate to do this to her. She's an awfully good sort, and—and— But I don't like this damned Havens!"

Almost before he knew it he was being presented to two handsome, fashionably dressed young women who sat together in the rear seat of the big mountain break.

"Every cloud has its silver lining," Miss Dering was saying. "Let me present you to Mr. Dudley's aunt, Mrs. Van Haltford, and to Miss Crozier, Mr. Rollins."

In a perfect maze of emotions, he found himself bowing before the two ladies, who smiled distantly and uncertainly. Dudley's aunt? That dashing young creature his aunt? Rossiter was staggered by the boldness of the claim. He could scarce restrain the scornful, brutal laugh of derision at this ridiculous play upon his credulity. To his secret satisfaction he discovered that the entire party seemed nervous and ill at ease. There was a trace of confusion in their behavior. He heard Miss Dering explain that he was to accompany the party and he saw

the poorly concealed look of disapproval and polite inquiry that went between the two ladies and Dudley. There was nothing for it, however, now that Miss Dering had committed herself, and he was advised to look to his luggage without delay.

He hurried into the station to arrange for the transportation of his trunk by stage, all the while smiling maliciously in his sleeve. Looking surreptitiously from a window he saw the quartet, all of them now on the break, arguing earnestly over—him, he was sure. Miss Dering was plaintively facing the displeasure of the trio. The coachman's averted face wore a half-grin. The discussion ended abruptly as Rossiter reappeared, but there was a coldness in the air that did not fail to impress him as portentous.

"I'm the elephant on their hands—the proverbial hot coal," he thought wickedly. "Well, they've got to bear it even if they can't grin. Then aloud cheerily: "All aboard! We're off!" He took his seat beside the driver.

II

The events of the ensuing weeks are best chronicled by the reproduction of Rossiter's own diary or report, with liberties in the shape of an author's comments.

THURSDAY.

"Settled comfortably in Eagle Nest House. Devilish rugged and out-of-the way place. Mrs. Van Haltford is called Aunt Josephine. She and Miss Debby Crozier have rooms on the third floor. Mine is next to theirs, Havens's is next to mine, and Mrs. Wharton has two rooms beyond his. We are not unlike a big family party. They're rather nice to me. I go walking with Aunt Josephine. I don't understand why I'm sandwiched in between Havens and Aunt Josephine. Otherwise the arrangement is neat. There is a veranda outside our windows. We sit upon it. Aunt Josephine is a great bluff, but she's clever. She's never napping. I've tried to pump her. Miss Crozier is harmless. She doesn't care. Havens never takes his eyes off Mrs. W. when they are together. She looks at him a good bit, too. They don't pay much attention to me. Aunt Josephine's husband is very old and very busy. He

can't take vacations. Everybody went to bed early to-night. No evidence to-day."

FRIDAY NIGHT.

"Havens and Mrs. W. went hill-climbing this afternoon and were gone for an hour before I missed them. Then I took Aunt Jo and Debby out for a quick climb. Confound Aunt Jo! She got tired in ten minutes and Debby wouldn't go on without her. I think it was a put-up job. The others didn't return till after six. She asked me if I'd like to walk about the grounds after dinner. Said I would. We did. Havens went with us. Couldn't shake him to save my life."

SATURDAY NIGHT.

"I have to watch myself constantly to keep from calling her Mrs. Wharton. I believe writing her real name is bad policy. It makes me forget. After this I shall call her Miss Dering, and I'll speak of him as Dudley. This morning he asked me to call him 'Jim.' He calls me 'Sam.' Actors do get familiar. When she came downstairs to go driving with him this morning I'll swear she was the prettiest thing I ever saw. They took a lunch and were gone for hours. I'd like to punch his face. She was very quiet all evening, and I fancied she avoided me. I smelt liquor on his breath just before bedtime.

"*One A. M.*—I thought everybody had gone to bed, but they are out there on the veranda talking. Just

outside her windows. I distinctly heard him call her 'dearest.' Something must have alarmed them, for they parted abruptly. He walked the veranda for an hour, all alone. Plenty of evidence."

SUNDAY NIGHT.

"For appearance's sake he took Miss Crozier for a walk to-day. I went to the chapel down the hill with Miss Dering and Aunt Josephine. Aunt Josephine put a ten-dollar bill in the box. Thinks she's squaring herself with the Lord, I suppose. Miss Dering was not at all talkative and gave every sign of being uncomfortable because he had the audacity to go walking with another girl. In the afternoon she complained of being ill and went to her room. Later on she sent for Dudley and Mrs. Van Haltford. They were in her room all afternoon. I smoked on the terrace with Debby. She is the most uninteresting girl I ever met. But she's on to their game. I know it because she forgot herself once, when I mentioned Miss Dering's illness, and said: 'Poor girl! She is in a most trying position. Don't you think Mr. Dudley is a splendid fellow?' I said that he was very good-looking, and she seemed to realize she had said something she ought not to have said and shut up. I'm sorry she's sick, though. I miss that parasol dreadfully. She always has it, and I can see her a mile away. Usually he carries it, though. Well, I suppose he has a right—as original owner. Jim and I smoked together this evening, but he evidently smells a mouse. He did not

talk much, and I caught him eying me strangely several times."

MONDAY NIGHT.

"Dudley has departed. I believe they are on to me. He went to Boston this afternoon, and he actually was gruff with me just before leaving. The size of the matter is, some one has posted him, and they are all up to my game as a spy. I wish I were out of it. Never was so ashamed of a thing in my life; don't feel like looking any one in the face. They've all been nice to me. But what's the difference? They're all interested. She went to the train with him and—the rest of us. I'll never forget how sad she looked as she held his hand and bade him good-by. I carried the parasol back to the hotel, and I know I hurt her feelings when I maliciously said that it would look well with a deep black border. She almost looked a hole through me. Fine eyes. I don't know what is coming next. She is liable to slip out from under my eye at any time and fly away to meet him somewhere else. I telegraphed this message to Grover & Dickhut:

"He has gone. She still here. What shall I do?

"Got this answer:

"Stay there and watch. They suspect you. Don't let her get away.

"But how the devil am I to watch day and night?"

The next week was rather an uneventful one for Rossiter. There was no sign of Havens and no effort on her part to leave Eagle Nest.

As the days went by he became more and more vigilant. In fact, his watch was incessant and very much of a personal one. He walked and drove with her, and he invented all sorts of excuses to avoid Mrs. Van Haltford and Miss Crozier. The purple parasol and he had become almost inseparable friends. The fear that Havens might return at any time kept him in a fever of anxiety and dread. Now that he was beginning to know her for himself he could not endure the thought that she cared for another man. Strange to say, he did not think of her husband. Old Wharton had completely faded from his mind; it was Havens that he envied. He saw himself sinking into her net, falling before her wiles, but he did not rebel.

He went to bed each night apprehensive that the next morning should find him alone and desolate at Eagle Nest, the bird flown. It hurt him to think that she would laugh over her feat of outwitting him. He was not guarding her for old Wharton now; he was in his own employ. All this time he knew it was wrong, and that she was trifling with him while the other was away. Yet he had eyes, ears, and a heart like all men, and they were for none save the pretty wife of Godfrey Wharton.

He spoke to her on several occasions of Dudley and gnashed his teeth when he saw a look of sadness, even

longing, come into her dark eyes. At such times he was tempted to tell her that he knew all, to confound her by charging her with guilt. But he could not collect the courage. For some accountable reason he held his bitter tongue. And so it was that handsome Sam Rossiter, spy and good fellow, fell in love with a woman who had a very dark page in her history.

She received mail, of course, daily, but he was not sneak enough to pry into its secrets, even had the chance presented itself. Sometimes she tossed the letters away carelessly, but he observed that there were some which she guarded jealously. Once he heard her tell Aunt Josephine that she had a letter from "Jim." He began to discover that "Jim" was a forbidden subject and that he was not discussed; at least, not in his presence. Many times he saw the two women in earnest, rather cautious conversation, and instinctively felt that Havens was the subject. Mrs. Wharton appeared piqued and discontented after these little talks. He made this entry in his diary one night, a week after Havens went away:

"I almost wish he'd come back and end the suspense. This thing is wearing on me. I was weighed to-day and I've lost ten pounds. Mrs. Van Haltford says I look hungry and advises me to try salt-water air. I'm hanged if I don't give up the job this week. I don't like it, anyhow. It doesn't seem square to be down here enjoying her society, taking her walking and all that, and all the time hunting up something with which to ruin her forever. I'll stick the week

out, but I'm not decided whether I'll produce any evidence against her if the Wharton *vs.* Wharton case ever does come to trial. I don't believe I could. I don't want to be a sneak."

One day Rossiter and the purple parasol escorted the pretty trifter over the valley to Bald Top, half a mile from the hotel. Mrs. Van Haltford and Miss Crozier were to join them later and were to bring with them Colonel Demin and Mr. Vincent, two friends who had lately arrived. The hotel was rapidly filling with fashionable guests, and Mrs. Wharton had petulantly observed, a day or two before, that the place was getting crowded and she believed she would go away soon. On the way over she said to him.

"I have about decided to go down to Velvet Springs for the rest of the month. Don't you think it is getting rather crowded here?"

"I have been pretty well satisfied," he replied, in an injured tone. "I don't see why you should want to leave here."

"Why should I stay if I am tired of the place?" she asked demurely, casting a roguish glance at his sombre face. He clenched the parasol and grated his teeth.

"She's leading me on, confound her!" he thought. At the same time his head whirled and his heart beat a little faster. "You shouldn't," he said, "if you are tired. There's more of an attraction at Velvet Springs, I suppose."

"Have you been there?"

"No."

"You answered rather snappishly. Have you a headache?"

"Pardon me; I didn't intend to answer snappishly, as you call it. I only wanted to be brief."

"Why?"

"Because I wanted to change the subject."

"Shall we talk of the weather?"

"I suppose we may as well," he said resignedly. She was plainly laughing at him now. "Look here," he said, stopping and looking into her eyes intently and somewhat fiercely, "why do you want to go to Velvet Springs?"

"Why should you care where I go?" she answered blithely, although her eyes wavered.

"It's because you are unhappy here and because some one else is there. I'm not blind, Mrs.—Miss Dering."

"You have no right to talk to me in that manner, Mr. Rollins. Come, we are to go back to the hotel at once," she said coldly. There was steel in her eyes.

He met her contemptuous look for a moment and quailed.

"I beg your pardon. I am a fool, but you have made me such," he said baldly.

"I? I do not understand you," and he could not but admire the clever, innocent, widespread eyes.

"You will understand me some day," he said, and to his amazement she flushed and looked away. They continued their walk, but there was a strange shyness in her manner that puzzled him.

"When is Dudley expected back here?" he asked abruptly.

She started sharply and gave him a quick, searching look. There was a guilty expression in her eyes, and he muttered something ugly under his breath.

"I do not know, Mr. Rollins," she answered.

"When did you hear from him last?" he demanded half savagely.

"I do not intend to be catechized by you, sir," she exclaimed, halting abruptly. "We shall go back. You are very ugly to-day and I am surprised."

"I supposed you had letters from him every day," he went on ruthlessly. She gave him a look in which he saw pain and the shadow of tears, and then she turned and walked swiftly toward the hotel. His conscience smote him and he turned after her. For the next ten minutes he was on his knees, figuratively, pleading for forgiveness. At last she paused and smiled sweetly into his face. Then she calmly turned and resumed the journey to Bald Top, saying demurely:

"We have nearly a quarter of a mile to retrace, all because you were so hateful."

"And you so obdurate," he added blissfully. He had tried to be severe and angry with her and had failed.

That very night the expected came to pass. Havens appeared on the scene, the same handsome, tragic-looking fellow, a trifle care-worn perhaps, but still—an evil genius. Rossiter ran plump into him in the hallway and was speechless for a moment. He

unconsciously shook hands with the new arrival, but his ears were ringing so with the thuds of his heart that he heard but few of the brisk words addressed to him. After the eager actor had left him standing humbly in the hall he managed to recall part of what had been said. He had come up on the express from Boston and could stay but a day or two. Did Mr. Rossiter know whether Miss Dering was in her room? The barrister also distinctly remembered that he did not ask for his aunt, which would have been the perfectly natural query.

Half an hour later Havens was strolling about the grounds, under the lamp lights, in and out of dark nooks, and close beside him was a slim figure in white. Their conversation was earnest, their manner secretive; that much the harassed Rossiter could see from the balcony. His heart grew sore and he could almost feel the tears of disappointment surging to his eyes. A glance in his mirror had shown him a face haggard and drawn, eyes strange and bright. He had not slept well, he knew; he had worn himself out in this despicable watch; he had grown to care for the creature he had been hired to spy upon. No wonder he was haggard.

Now he was jealous—madly, fiendishly jealous. In his heart there was the savage desire to kill the other man and to denounce the woman. Pacing the grounds about the hotel, he soon worked himself into a fever, devilish in its hotness. More than once he passed them, and it was all he could do to refrain from springing upon them. At length he did what most

men do: he took a drink. Whisky flew down his throat and to his brain. In his mind's eye he saw her in the other's arms—and he could bear it no longer! Rushing to his room, he threw himself on the bed and cursed.

“Good heaven! I love her! I love her better than all the world! I can't stay here and see any more of it! By thunder, I'll go back to New York and they can go to the devil! So can old Wharton! And so can Grover & Dickhut!”

He leaped to his feet, dashed headlong to the telegraph office downstairs, and ten minutes later this message was flying to Grover & Dickhut:

Get some one else for this job. I'm done with it. Coming home.—SAM.

“I'm coming on the first train, too,” muttered the sender, as he hurried up-stairs. “I can pack my trunk for the night stage. I'd like to say good-by to her, but I can't—I couldn't stand it. What's the difference? She won't care whether I go or stay—rather have me go. If I were to meet her now I'd—yes, by George—kiss her! It's wrong to love her, but——”

There was nothing dignified about the manner in which big Sam Rossiter packed his trunk. He fairly stamped the clothing into it and did a lot of other absurd things. When he finally locked it and yanked out his watch his brow was wet and he was trembling. It had taken just five minutes to do the packing.

His hat was on the back of his head, his collar was melting, and his cigar was chewed to a pulp. Cane and umbrella were yanked from behind the door and he was ready to fly. The umbrella made him think of a certain parasol, and his heart grew still and cold with the knowledge that he was never to carry it again.

"I hope I don't meet any of 'em," he muttered, pulling himself together and rushing into the hall. A porter had already jerked his trunk down the stair steps.

As he hastened after it he heard the swish of skirts and detected in the air a familiar odor, the subtle scent of a perfume that he could not forget were he to live a thousand years. The next moment she came swiftly around a corner in the hall, hurrying to her rooms. They met and both started in surprise, her eyes falling to his travelling-bag, and then lifting to his face in bewilderment. He checked his hurried flight and she came quite close to him. The lights in the hall were dim and the elevator car had dropped to regions below.

"Where are you going?" she asked in some agitation.

"I am going back to New York," he answered, controlling himself with an effort. She was so beautiful, there in the dim hallway.

"To-night?" she asked in very low tones.

"In half an hour."

"And were you going without saying good-by to—to us?" she went on rapidly.

He looked steadily down into her solemn eyes for a moment and an expression of pain, of longing, came into his own.

"It couldn't make any difference whether I said good-by to you, and it would have been hard," he replied unsteadily.

"Hard? I don't understand you," she said.

"I didn't want to see you. Yes, I hoped to get away before you knew anything about it. Maybe it was cowardly, but it was the best way," he cried bitterly.

"What do you mean?" she cried, and he detected alarm, confusion, guilt in her manner.

"You know what I mean. I know everything—I knew it before I came here, before I saw you. It's why I am here, I'm ashamed to say. But, have no fear—have no fear! I've given up the job—the nasty job—and you can do as you please. The only trouble is that I have been caught in the web; I've been trapped myself. You've made me care for you. That's why I'm giving it all up. Don't look so frightened—I'll promise to keep your secret."

Her eyes were wide, her lips parted, but no words came; she seemed to shrink from him as if he were the headsmen and she his victim.

"I'll do it, right or wrong!" he gasped suddenly. And in an instant his satchel clattered to the floor and his arms were straining the slight figure to his breast. Burning lips met hers and sealed them tight. She shivered violently, struggled for an instant in his mad embrace, but made no outcry. Gradually her

free arm stole upward and around his neck and her lips responded to the passion in his. His kiss of ecstasy was returned. The thrill of joy that shot through him was almost overpowering. A dozen times he kissed her. Unbelieving, he held her from him and looked hungrily into her eyes. They were wet with tears.

"Why do you go? I love you!" she whispered faintly.

Then came the revulsion. With an oath he threw her from him. Her hands went to her temples and a moan escaped her lips.

"Bah!" he snarled. "Get away from me! Heaven forgive me for being as weak as I've been to-night!"

"Sam!" she wailed piteously.

"Don't tell me anything! Don't try to explain! Be honest with one man, at least!"

"You must be insane!" she cried tremulously.

"Don't play innocent, madam. I *know*." In abject error she shrank away from him. "But I have kissed you! If I live a thousand years I shall not forget its sweetness."

He waved his hands frantically above her, grabbed up his suit-case and traps, and, with one last look at the petrified woman shrinking against the wall under the blasts of his vituperation, he dashed for the stairway. And so he left her, a forlorn, crushed figure.

Blindly he tore downstairs and to the counter. He hardly knew what he was doing as he drew forth his pocket-book to pay his account.

"Going away, Mr. Rollins?" inquired the clerk, glancing at the clock. It was eleven-twenty and the last stage-coach left for Fossingford at eleven-thirty, in time to catch the seven o'clock down train.

"Certainly," was the excited answer.

"A telegram came a few moments ago for you, sir, but I thought you were in bed," and the other tossed a little envelope out to him. Mechanically Rossiter tore it open. He was thinking of the cowering woman in the hallway and he was cursing himself for his brutality.

He read the despatch with dizzy eyes and drooping jaw, once, twice, thrice. Then he leaned heavily against the counter and a coldness assailed his heart, so bitter that he felt his blood freezing. It read:

What have you been doing? The people you were sent to watch sailed for Europe ten days ago.

GROVER & DICKHUT.

The paper fell from his trembling fingers, but he regained it, natural instinct inspiring a fear that the clerk would read it.

"Good Lord!" he gasped.

"Bad news, Mr. Rollins?" asked the clerk sympathetically, but the stricken, bewildered man did not answer.

What did it mean? A vast faintness attacked him as the truth began to penetrate. Out of the whirling mystery came the astounding, ponderous realization that he had blundered, that he had wronged her, that

he had accused her of—Oh, that dear, stricken figure in the hallway above!

He leaped to the staircase. Three steps at a time he flew back to the scene of the miserable tragedy. What he thought, what he felt as he rushed into the hallway can only be imagined. She was gone—heart-broken, killed! And she had kissed him and said she loved him!

A light shone through the transoms over the doors that led into her apartments. Quaking with fear, he ran down the hall and beat a violent tattoo upon her parlor door. Again he rapped, crazed by remorse, fear, love, pity, shame, and a hundred other emotions.

“Who is it?” came in stifled tones from within.

“It is I—Rossiter—I mean Rollins! I must see you—now! For pity’s sake let me in!”

“How dare you—” she began shrilly; but he was not to be denied.

“If you don’t open this door I’ll kick it in!” he shouted. “I must see you!”

After a moment the door flew open and he stood facing her. She was like a queen. Her figure was as straight as an arrow, her eyes blazing. But there had been tears in them a moment before.

“Another insult!” she exclaimed, and the scorn in her voice was withering. He paused abashed, for the first time realizing that he had hurt her beyond reparation. His voice faltered and the tears flew to his eyes.

“I don’t know what to say to you. It has been a mistake—a frightful mistake—and I don’t know

whether you'll let me explain. When I got downstairs I found this telegram and—for heaven's sake, let me tell you the wretched story. Don't turn away from me! You shall listen to me if I have to hold you!" His manner changed suddenly to the violent, imperious forcefulness of a man driven to the last resort.

"Must I call for help?" she cried, thoroughly alarmed, once more the weak woman, face to face, as she thought, with an insane man.

"I love you better than my own life, and I've hurt you terribly. I'm not crazy, Helen! But I've been a fool, and I'll go crazy if you don't give me a chance to explain."

Whether she gave the chance or no he took it, and from his eager, pleading lips raced the whole story of his connection with the Wharton affair from first to last. He humbled himself, accused himself, ridiculed himself, and wound up by throwing himself upon her mercy, uttering protestations of the love which had really been his undoing.

She heard him through without a word. The light in her eyes changed; the fear left them and the scorn fled. Instead there grew, by stages, wonder, incredulity, wavering doubt and—joy. She understood him and she loved him! The awful horror of that meeting in the hallway was swept away like unto the transformation scene in the fairy spectacle.

When he fell upon his knee and sought to clasp her fingers in his cold hand she smiled, and, stooping over, placed both hands on his cheeks and kissed him.

What followed her kiss of forgiveness may be more easily imagined than told.

"You see it was perfectly natural for me to mistake you for Mrs. Wharton," he said after awhile. "You had the gray jacket, the sailor hat, the purple parasol, and you are beautiful. And, besides all that, you were found red-handed in that ridiculous town of Fossingford. Why shouldn't I have suspected you with such a preponderance of evidence against you? Anybody who would get off of a night train in Fossingford certainly ought to be ashamed of something."

"But Fossingford is on the map, isn't it? One has a perfect right to get off where she likes, hasn't she, provided it is on the map?"

"Not at all! That's what maps are for: to let you see where you don't get off."

"But I was obliged to get off there. My ticket said 'Fossingford,' and, besides, I was to be met at the station in a most legitimate manner. You had no right to jump at conclusions."

"Well, if you had not descended to earth at Fossingford I wouldn't be in heaven at Eagle Nest. Come to think of it, I believe you did quite the proper thing in getting off at Fossingford—no matter what the hour."

"You must remember always that I have not taken you to task for a most flagrant piece of—shall I say indiscretion?"

"Good Heavens!"

"You stopped off at Fossingford for the sole purpose of seeing another woman."

"That's all very fine, dear, but you'll admit that Dudley was an excellent substitute for Havens. Can't you see how easy it was to be mistaken?"

"I won't fall into easy submission. Still, I believe I could recommend you as a detective. They usually do the most unheard of things—just as you have. Poor Jim Dudley an actor! Mistaken for such a man as you say Havens is! It is even more ridiculous than that I should be mistaken for Mrs. Wharton."

"Say, I'd like to know something about Dudley. It was his confounded devotion to you that helped matters along in my mind. What is he to you?"

"He came here to-night to repeat a question that had been answered unalterably once before. Jim Dudley? Have you never heard of James Dudley, the man who owns all of those big mines in South America, the man who——"

"Who owns the yachts and automobiles and—and the railroad trains? Is he the one? The man with the millions? Good Lord! And you could have had him instead of me? Helen, I—I don't understand it. Why didn't you take him?"

She hesitated a moment before answering brightly:

"Perhaps it is because I have a fancy for the ridiculous."

HER WEIGHT IN GOLD

HER WEIGHT IN GOLD

“Well, the question is: how much does she weigh?” asked Eddie Ten Eyck with satirical good humour.

His somewhat flippant inquiry followed the heated remark of General Horatio Gamble, who, in desperation, had declared that his step-daughter, Martha, was worth her weight in gold.

The General was quite a figure in the town of Essex. He was the president of the Town and Country Club and, besides owning a splendid stud, was also the possessor of a genuine Gainsborough, picked up at the shop of an obscure dealer in antiques in New York City for a ridiculously low price (two hundred dollars, it has been said), and which, according to a rumour started by himself, was worth a hundred thousand if it was worth a dollar, although he contrived to keep the secret from the ears of the county tax collector. He had married late in life, after accumulating a fortune that no woman could despise, and of late years had taken to frequenting the Club with a far greater assiduity than is customary in most presidents.

Young Mr. Ten Eyck's sarcasm was inspired by a

mind's-eye picture of Miss Martha Gamble. To quote Jo Grigsby, she was "so plain that all comparison began and ended with her." Without desiring to appear ungallant, I may say that there were many homely young women in Essex; but each of them had the delicate satisfaction of knowing that Martha was incomparably her superior in that respect.

"I am not jesting, sir," said the General with asperity. "Martha may not be as good-looking as—er—some girls that I've seen, but she is a jewel, just the same. The man who gets her for a wife will be a blamed sight luckier than the fellows who marry the brainless little fools we see trotting around like butterflies." (It was the first time that Eddie had heard of trotting butterflies.)

"She's a fine girl," was his conciliatory remark.

"She is pure gold," said the General with conviction. "Pure gold, sir."

"A nugget," agreed Eddie expansively. "A hundred and eighty pound nugget, General. Why don't you send her to a refinery?"

The General merely glared at him and subsided into thoughtful silence. He was in the habit of falling into deep spells of abstraction at such times as this. For the life of him, he couldn't understand how Martha came by her excessive plainness. Her mother was looked upon as a beautiful woman and her father (the General's predecessor) had been a man worth looking at, even from a successor's point of view.

That Martha should have grown up to such appalling ugliness was a source of wonder, not only to the General, but to Mrs. Gamble herself.

Young Mr. Ten Eyck was the most impecunious spendthrift in Essex. He lived by his wits, with which he was more generously endowed than anything in the shape of gold or precious jewels. His raiment was accumulative. His spending money came to him through an allowance that his grandmother considerably delivered to him at regular periods, but as is the custom with such young men he was penniless before the quarter was half over. At all times he was precariously close to being submerged by his obligations. Yet trouble sat lightly upon his head, if one were to judge by outward appearances. Beneath a bland, care-free exterior, however, there lurked in Edward's bosom a perpetual pang of distress over the financial situation.

What worried him most was the conviction that all signs pointed toward the suspension of credit in places where he owed money, and, as he owed without discrimination, the future seemed hard to contemplate.

Prudent mothers stood defiantly between him and what might have been prosperity. He could win the hearts of daughters with shameful regularity and ease, but he could not delude the heads of the families to which they belonged. They knew him well and wisely.

The conversation between him and General Gamble took place in the reading-room of the Town and

Country Club. There was a small table between them, and glasses.

"What is the market price of gold to-day, General?" asked Eddie impudently, after he had watched the old man's gloomy countenance out of the corner of his eye for the matter of three minutes or more.

The General regarded him with deep scorn. "Gold? What do you know about gold? You seldom see anything more precious than copper."

"That's no joke," agreed Eddie with his frank smile. "I am the only, original penny limit. That reminds me, General. I meant to speak of it before, but somehow it slipped my mind. Could you lend me—"

The General held up his hand. "I've been waiting for that, Eddie. Don't humiliate yourself by asking for a small amount. I haven't the remotest idea how much you already owe me, but it doesn't matter in view of the fact that you'll never pay it. You were about to request the loan of ten dollars, my boy. Why not ask for a respectable amount?—say, fifty dollars."

Eddie's heart leaped. "That's just the amount I meant to ask you to let me have for a week or two. 'Pon my word, it is."

"Well," said the General, taking a notebook from his pocket and carefully jotting down an entry with his gold-tipped pencil, "I cheerfully give it to you, Eddie. I shall credit your account with that amount. Fifty dollars—um! It is a new system I have con-

cluded to adopt. Every time you ask me for a loan I shall subtract the amount from what you already owe me. In time, you see, the whole debt will be lifted, and you'll not owe me a cent."

Eddie blinked. A slow grin crept into his face as he grasped the irony in the General's scheme.

"Fine financing, General. It suits me to a dot. By the way, do you think you can spare another hundred or two?"

"The books are closed for the month," said the General placidly. He rang the bell on the table. "More ice, boy, and the same bottle. As I was saying, Eddie, I can't for the life of me see why you fellows are so blind when it comes to Martha. She is—"

"We are *not* blind," interrupted Eddie, not at all annoyed by his failure to negotiate the loan. "That's just the trouble. If a blind man came along, I've not doubt he could see something attractive in her."

"Damme! If she were my own daughter, I'd thrash you for that remark, sir."

"If she were your own daughter, you wouldn't be discussing her with a high-ball in your hand."

The General coughed. "Ahem! Eddie, I'd give a good deal to see that girl married. Leave the bottle on the table, boy. She will have money—a lot of it—one of these days. There are dozens of young men that we know who'd do 'most anything for money. I— By George!" He broke off to stare with glittering eyes at the face of the young man

opposite. A great thought was expanding in his brain.

Eddie shifted nervously. "Why are you looking at me like that? I don't need it that badly."

"I'd never thought of you, Eddie,—'pon my word I hadn't. Not until this moment. You need money worse than any one I know. There isn't another girl in town who would marry you, and Martha *would*. Believe me, she would! And let me tell you, sir, you couldn't find a truer wife than Martha. You—"

"She couldn't help being true," mused Eddie, rattling the ice in his empty-glass. The General pushed the bottle toward him.

"She is a bit older than you, I'll admit," pursued the General reflectively. "Worth her weight in gold," he murmured with a sort of ecstasy in his voice.

Young Ten Eyck assumed an injured air. "I am poor, General Gamble, but I am *not* blind."

"She likes you," went on the older man, revelling in the new-found hope. "You don't amount to much,—and she knows it, I suppose,—but you can have her, my boy. She'll be the richest girl in Essex when I die. Take her, my boy; I gladly give my consent. Will you permit me to congratu—"

"One moment, if you please. In a case like this, you would *never* die. It would be just my luck. No, I thank you. I decline the honour. If you could perform a miracle and transform her into *real* gold, I might consider the proposition, but not as it now stands."

"She weighs about one-eighty," said the General speculatively.

Eddie glanced at him sharply. "One hundred and eighty pounds in gold. Quite a pile, eh?"

The General was silent for a long time, permitting the vague idea to thrive in his harassed mind. His young companion was moodily trying to estimate the value of one hundred and eighty pounds of virgin gold.

At last the General reached a conclusion. It was a rather heroic effort. He relighted his cigar with trembling fingers.

"I suppose you haven't heard of the wedding present I intend to bestow upon the fortunate man who leads her to the altar?" said he, casting the fatal die.

"No; but a separate house and lot wouldn't be despised, I should say."

"Nonsense. By the way, Eddie, this must not go any farther. It's strictly *entre nous*. I don't want to have the dear girl pestered to death by fortune hunters. On his wedding day the man who marries Martha is to have the equivalent of her weight in double eagles. Isn't that ra-ather handsome?"

He sank back and waited for the seed to sink deeply into Ten Eyck soil. Eddie's eyelids flickered. The grin of a Cheshire cat came to his lips involuntarily and remained there without modification for the matter of an hour or two.

"Great!" he said at last.

"I must be on my way," observed the wily step-

father, beating a retreat so hastily that Eddie missed the opportunity to scoff. But the contemplative smile remained just as he had left it.

Several days passed before the two met again. The General had sowed wisely, and he was reasonably certain of the harvest. He knew that it would be hard for young Ten Eyck to bring himself to the sacrificial altar; but that he would come and would bend his neck was a foregone conclusion. He went on the theory that if you give a man rope enough he'll hang himself, and he felt that Eddie was almost at the end of his rope in these cruel days.

As for Eddie, he tried to put the thought out of his mind, but as time went on he caught himself many times—(with a start of shame)—trying to approximate the worth of Martha Gamble on the basis set forth by her step-father. The second day after the interview he consulted a friend of his who happened to be a jeweller. From him he ascertained the present market value of twenty-four carat gold. So much for the start!

His creditors were threatening to sue or to "black-list" him; his friends long since had begun to dodge him, fearing the habitual request for temporary loans; his allowance was not due for several weeks. Circumstances were so harsh that even Martha appeared desirable by contrast. He felt an instinctive longing for rest, and peace, and—pecuniary absolution.

He was therefore deserving of pity when he finally surrendered to the inevitable. How he cursed himself

—(and his creditors)—as he set out to find the General on that bright spring day when every other living creature on earth seemed to be happy and free from care. Kismet!

General Gamble was reading in a quiet corner of the Club. That is to say, he had the appearance of one reading. As a matter of fact, he had been watching Eddie's shy, uncertain evolutions for half an hour or more, and he chuckled inwardly. As many as ten times the victim strolled through the reading room, on the pretext of looking for some one. Something told the General that he was going to lose Martha.

At last Eddie approached him. He came with the swift impetuosity of a man who has decided and is afraid to risk a reaction.

"Hello, General," was his crisp greeting as he dropped into the chair which the astute old gentleman had placed, with premeditation, close to his own some time before. He went straight to the point. "I've been thinking over what you said the other day about Martha. Well, I'll marry her."

"You!" exclaimed the General, simulating incredulity. "You!"

"Yes. I'll be *it*. How much does she really weigh?"

"Are—are you in earnest, my boy?" cried the other. "Why, she'll be tickled to death!"

"May I have her?"

"God bless you,—*yes!*"

"I suppose I ought to go up and see her and—and

tell her I love her," said Eddie lugubriously. "Or," with a fine inspiration, "perhaps you wouldn't mind telling her for me. I—"

"Tell her yourself, you young rascal," cried the General in fine good humour, poking his prospective stepson-in-law in the ribs.

Eddie winced. "You can do that to me now, but if you jab me in the ribs after I'm married I'll jab you in the eye."

"Good! I like your spirit. Gad, I love a fighting-man! And now, my boy, it seems to me there's no sense in delaying matters. You have my consent. As a matter of form you ought to get Martha's. She'll take you, of course, but I—I suppose she would like the idea of being proposed to. They all do. I daresay you two can settle the point in a jiffy in some quiet nook up at the— But, there! I shall not offer suggestions to you in an affair of the heart, my son. Will you be up to see her this evening?"

Eddie drew a long breath. "If—if she has no other engagement."

"Engagement?" gasped the General, with popping eyes. "She hasn't sat up after eight o'clock in four years, except on Christmas Eve. You won't be disturbed; so come around."

"Perhaps, to be sure of finding her up, I'd better come to dinner."

"By all means. Stay as late as you like, too. She won't get sleepy to-night. Not a bit of it." He arose to depart.

"Just a moment, General," said Eddie curtly.

"We've got a few preliminaries to arrange before I commit myself. Here is a paper for you to sign. Business is business, you know, and this is the first really business-like thing I've ever done. Be good enough to read this paper very carefully before signing."

General Gamble put on his glasses and read the brief, but ample contract which bound him to pay to Edward Peabody Ten Eyck, on the day that he was married to Martha Gamble, for better or for worse, an amount equivalent to the value of her weight in pure gold. He hesitated for one brief, dubious moment, then called for pen, ink, and paper. When these articles were brought to him, he deliberately drew up a second contract by which Edward Ten Eyck bound himself to wed Martha Gamble (and no other) on a day to be named by mutual consent at a later date—but not very much later, he was privately resolved.

"Now," said he, "we'll each sign one. You sha'n't get the better of me, my boy."

Each signed in the presence of two waiters, neither of whom knew the nature of the instruments.

"Troy weight," said the General magnanimously. "She is a jewel, you know."

"Certainly. It's stipulated in the contract—twenty-four carat gold. You said pure, you remember. You may have noticed that I take her at the prevailing market price of gold. It is now four cents a carat. Twenty-four carats in a pennyweight. That makes ninety-six cents per pennyweight.

Twenty pennyweight in an ounce, and there we have nineteen dollars and twenty cents per ounce. We'll—we'll weigh her in by ounces."

"That's reasonable. The price of gold isn't likely to fluctuate much."

"It must be distinctly understood that you keep her well-fed from this day on, General. I won't have her fluctuating. She hasn't any silly notions about reducing, has she?"

"My dear fellow, she poses as a Venus," cried the General.

"Good! And here's another point: pardon me for suggesting it, but you understand that she's to weigh in—er—that is to say, her clothing is to be weighed in with her."

"What's that?"

"You heard what I said. She's to be settled for—dressed."

"Good Lord, she isn't a chicken!"

"Nobody said she was. It is fit and proper that her garments should be weighed with her. Hang it all, man, I'm marrying her clothes as well as anything else."

"I will not agree to that. It's preposterous."

"I don't mean her entire wardrobe. Just the going-away gown and hat. You can't very well ask her to weigh herself without any—But as gentlemen we need not pursue the matter any farther. You shall have your way about it."

"She has a new pair of scales in her bedroom. She weighs herself every night for her own grati-

fication. I don't see why she can't do it once or twice for my sake."

"But women are such dreadful liars about their own weight. She'll be sure to lop off fifteen or twenty pounds in the telling. Hang it, I want witnesses."

The General assumed a look of distress. "Remember, sir, that you are speaking of your future wife. You'll have to take her word."

Eddie slumped down in his chair, muttering something about niggardliness.

"I suppose I'll have to concede the point." His eyes twinkled. "I say, it would be a horrible shock to you, General, if she were to refuse me to-night."

"She sha—*won't!*" said the General, setting his jaw, but turning a shade paler. "She'll jump at the chance."

Eddie sighed dismally. "Doesn't it really seem awful to you?"

"Having you for a son-in-law? *Yes.*"

"You know I'm only doing this because I want to set up in business for myself and need the money," explained the groom-elect in an effort to justify himself. "Oh, another little point. I'd almost forgotten it. I suppose it will be perfectly convenient for us to live with you for a year or two, until I—"

"No!" thundered the General. "Not by a long shot! You go to housekeeping at once, do you understand?"

"But think of her poor mother's feelings—"

"Her mother has nothing whatever to do with it, sir. See here, we'll put that in the contract." He

was visibly disturbed by the thought of what the oversight might have meant to him. "And now, when shall we have the wedding?"

"Perhaps we'd better leave that to Martha."

"We'll leave nothing to anybody."

"She'll want to get a trousseau together and all that sort of thing. I'm ready to go through with it at any time, but you know what girls are." He was perspiring.

"Yes," said the General with a reminiscent light in his eye. "I daresay they all enjoy a few weeks of courtship and love-making."

Eddie gulped suddenly and then shot a quick, hunted look toward the buffet door.

"Have a drink?" demanded the other abruptly. He had caught the sign of danger.

They strolled into the buffet, arm-in-arm, one loving the world in general, the other hating everybody in it, including the General. Before they parted Eddie Ten Eyck extracted a solemn promise from his future step-father-in-law that he would ascertain Martha's exact weight and report the figure to him on the following day.

"It will seem easier if I know just about what to expect," explained the young man.

That very afternoon the General, with a timidity that astonished him, requested his step-daughter to report her correct weight to him on the following morning. He kept his face well screened behind his newspaper while speaking, and his voice was a little thick.

"What for, father?" asked Martha, looking up from her book in surprise. Her eyes seemed to grow even larger than the lenses of her spectacles.

"Why, you see—er—I'm figuring on a little more insurance," he stammered.

"What has my weight to do with it?"

"It isn't life insurance," he made haste to explain. A bright idea struck him. "It is fire insurance, my dear."

"I don't see what my—"

"Of course you don't," he interrupted genially. "It's this way. The fire insurance companies are getting absurdly finicky about the risks. Now they insist on knowing the weight of every inmate of the houses they insure. Has something to do with the displacement of oxygen, I believe. Your mother and I—and the servants, too—expect to be weighed to-night."

"Oh," she said, and resumed her reading.

He waited for a while, fumbling nervously with his watch chain.

"By the way, my dear," he said, "what have you been doing to that bully chap, Eddie Ten Eyck?"

"Doing to him? What do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"I haven't seen the miserable loafer in months," she said. Her voice was heavy, not unlike that of a man. For some reason she shuffled uneasily in her chair. The book dropped into her capacious lap.

"You've been doing something behind my back,

you sly minx," he chided. "What do you think happened to-day?"

"To Eddie Ten Eyck?"

"In a way, yes. He came up to me in the Club and asked my permission to pay—er—court to you, my dear. He said he loved you better than— Hey! Look out there! What the dev— Hi, Mother! Come here quick! Good Heaven, she's going to die!"

Poor Martha had collapsed in a heap, her arms dangling limply over the side of the chair, her eyes bulging and blinking in a most grotesque manner. At first glance one would have sworn she was strangling. Afterwards the General denounced himself as an unmitigated idiot for having given her such a shock. He ought to have known better.

Mrs. Gamble rushed downstairs in great alarm, and it was not long before they had Martha breathing naturally, although the General almost made that an impossibility by the ruthless manner in which he fanned her with the very book she had been reading—a heavy volume which he neglected to open.

The whirligig room reduced itself to a library for Martha once more, not so monotonous as it once had been, no doubt, but still a library. Out of the turmoil of her own emotions, she managed to grasp enough of what the General was saying to convince herself that this was not another dream but a reality, and she became so excited that her mother advised her to go to bed for a while before dinner, if she expected to appear at her best when Eddie arrived.

For the first time since early childhood, Martha blushed as she attempted to trip lightly upstairs. As a matter of fact, she *did* trip on next to the top step and sprawled. Under ordinary circumstances she would have been as mad as a wet hen, but on this happy occasion she merely cried out, when her parents dashed into the hall below on hearing the crash:

“It’s good luck to fall upstairs!”

The fires of life had been rekindled, and when such a thing happens to a person of Martha’s horse-power, the effect is astonishing. At four o’clock she began dressing for the coming suitor. When he arrived at seven, she was still trying to decide whether her hair looked better by itself or with augmentations.

Below, in the huge library, Eddie Ten Eyck sat disconsolate, nervously contemplating the immediate future. He was all alone. Not even a servant was to be seen or heard. It was as still as the Christmas Eve whose jingle we love so well.

Never in all his aimless existence had he felt so small, so unimportant, so put-upon as at this moment. His gaze, sweeping the ceiling of the library, tried to penetrate to the sacred precincts above. Even the riches and the stateliness of the Gamble mansion failed to reimburse his fancy for the losses it was sustaining with each succeeding minute of suspense. Dimly he recalled that General Gamble had spent nearly half a million dollars in the construction of this imposing edifice. The library was worth more than one hundred thousand dollars; the stables were stocked with innumerable thoroughbreds; the landed

estate was measured by sections instead of acres; the stocks and bonds were— But even as he considered the question of assets, there surged up before him an overwhelming liability that brought the General's books to balance.

By this time, Eddie had become so proficient in the art of rapid calculation that he could estimate within a few ounces just what a person would have to weigh in order to be worth as much as the library, the mansion, or the bonds. The great Gainsborough that hung in the west end of the room corresponded in value (if reports were true concerning the price Gamble had asked for it) to a woman weighing a shade over two hundred and three pounds troy.

He lifted a handsome bronze figure from the library table and murmured: "It's worth a ten-pound baby, twenty-two hundred dollars and a fraction."

The General came in, followed closely by the butler, who bore a tray holding at least ten cocktails. After the greetings, Eddie glanced uneasily at the cocktails.

"Is—is it to be as big a dinner as all this?" he asked ruefully.

"Oh, no. Just family, my boy; we four. The women don't drink, Eddie, so help yourself."

Eddie gratefully swallowed three in rapid succession.

"I see you mean to make it absolutely necessary for me to take the gold cure," he said with a forlorn smile.

Martha put in an appearance at seven-thirty, having kept dinner waiting for half an hour, much to the

amazement of those who had lived with her long enough to know her promptness in appearing for meals.

Mr. Ten Eyck, who was a rather good-looking chap and fastidious to a degree, did not possess the strength to keep his heart anywhere near the customary level. It went hurtling to his very boots. He shook hands with the blushing young woman and then involuntarily shrank toward the cocktails, disregarding the certainty that he would find them lukewarm and tasteless.

She was gotten up for the occasion. But, as it was not her costume that he was to embrace in matrimony, we will omit a description of the creation she wore. It was pink, of course, and cut rather low in order to protect her face from the impudent gaze of man.

Her face? Picture the face of the usual heroine in fiction and then contrive to think of the most perfect antithesis, and you have Martha in your mind's eye much more clearly than through any description I could hope to present.

She was squat. Her somewhat brawny shoulders sloped downward and forward—and perhaps a little sidewise, I am not sure about that. Her hair was straw-coloured and stringy in spite of the labour she had expended on it with curling-iron and brush. As to her face, the more noticeable features were a very broad, flat nose, a comparatively chinless under jaw, on which grew an accidental wisp of hair or two; a narrow and permanently decorated upper lip. When

she smiled—well, the effect was discouraging, to say the least. Her eyes were pale and prominent. In spite of all this, practice in rouging might have helped her a little, but she had had no practice. Young men never came to the house, and it was not worth while to keep up appearances for the old ones who were content to dodder at the end of the way. You would say at a glance that she was a very strong and enduring person, somewhat along the lines of a suffragette ward politician.

The dinner was a genial one, after all. The General was at his best, and the wine was perfect. In lucid moments, Eddie found himself reflecting: "If I can drink enough of this I'll have delirium tremens and then I won't have to believe all that I see."

Martha had always called him Eddie. In fact, every one called him Eddie. He was that sort of a chap. To-night, he observed, with a hazy interest, she addressed him as Mr. Ten Eyck, and rather frequently, at that. It was: "Do you really think so, Mr. Ten Eyck?" or "How very amusing, Mr. Ten Eyck," or "Good gracious, Mr. Ten Eyck," until poor Eddie, unused to this distinction, reached a point where he muttered something in way of protest that caused the General to cough violently in order to give his guest a chance to recover himself before it was too late.

After dinner the General and Mrs. Gamble retired somewhat precipitously, leaving the young people alone.

Eddie heaved a tremendous sigh of decision and

bravely crossed the room. Martha was seated upon the davenport, nervously toying with her fan. He saw with misgiving that she evidently expected something was going to happen. Her eyes were down-cast.

He stood silent and somewhat awed before her many minutes, taking the final puffs at an abbreviated cigarette. Then he abruptly sat down at the opposite end of the couch. As he did so, she thought she heard him mutter something about "one hundred and seventy, at the lowest."

"So many people have given up playing golf, Mr. Ten Eyck," she said. "I am surprised that you keep it up."

"Golf?" he murmured blankly.

"Weren't you speaking of your score for the eighteen holes?"

He gazed at her helplessly for a moment, then set his jaw.

"Say, Martha," he began, in a high and unnatural treble, "I am a man of few words. Will you marry me? Oh! Ouch! What the dickens are you doing? O—oh! Don't jump at me like that!"

The details are painful and it isn't necessary to go into them. Suffice it to say, she told him that he had always been her ideal and that she had worshipped him from childhood's earliest days. He, on the other hand, confessed, with more truth than she could have guessed, that he had but recently come to a realisation of her true worth, and what she really meant to him.

She set the wedding day for November the cleventh, —just seven weeks off.

Before leaving,—she kept him until nearly twelve,—he playfully came up behind her as she stood near the table, and, placing his hands under her elbows, said:

“Hold ’em stiff now.”

Then, to her amazement, he tried to lift her from the floor. He couldn’t budge her.

“It’s all right,” he exclaimed exultantly and refused to explain.

That night in his dreams an elephant came along and stood for a while on his chest, but he was used to it by that time, and didn’t mind.

The next morning, General Gamble reported by telephone that Martha weighed one hundred and sixty-eight pounds and nine ounces. A minute later, Eddie was at his desk calculating.

On the twenty-third of September she weighed two thousand and twenty-five ounces troy. At nineteen dollars and twenty cents an ounce she was then worth \$38,880. With any sort of luck, he figured, she might be expected to pick up a few pounds as the result of her new-found happiness and peace of mind. Her worries were practically over. Contented people always put on flesh. If everything went well, she ought to represent at least \$40,000 on her wedding day. Perhaps more.

He haunted the Country Club by day and the town clubs by night, always preoccupied and figuring, much to the astonishment of his friends and cronies. He

scribbled inexplicable figures on the backs of golf cards, bar checks, and menus.

By the end of the first week he had made definite promises to all of his creditors. He guaranteed that every one should be paid before the middle of November. Moreover, he set aside in his calculations the sum of \$7,000 for the purchase of a new house. Early in the second week he had virtually expended \$15,000 of what he expected to receive, and was giving thanks for increased opportunities.

He called at the Gamble house regularly, even faithfully. True, he urged Martha to play on the piano nearly all of the time, but to all intents and purposes it was courtship.

When the engagement was announced, the town—in utter ignorance of the conspiracy—went into convulsions. The half-dozen old maids in upper circles who had long since given up hope began to prink and perk themselves into an amazing state of rejuvenation,—revival, you might say. They tortured themselves with the hope that never dies. They even lent money to impecunious gentlemen who couldn't believe their senses and went about pinching themselves.

Eddie Ten Eyck's credit was so good that he succeeded in borrowing nearly five thousand dollars from erstwhile adamant sceptics.

One day the General met him in the street. The old soldier wore a troubled look.

"She's sick," he said without preamble. "Got pains all over her and chills, too."

"Is it serious?" demanded Eddie.

"I don't know. Neither does the doctor. He's waiting for developments. Took a culture to-day. She's in bed, however."

"*She must not die*," said Eddie, a desperate gleam in his eye. "I—can't afford to have anything like that happen now. Can't she be vaccinated?"

At the end of the second day thereafter it was known all over town that Martha Gamble was ill with typhoid fever. She was running a temperature of 104 degrees and two doctors had come up from New York to consult with the Essex physician, bringing with them a couple of trained nurses. They said her heart was good.

After the consultation, the General and Eddie sat alone in the library, woebegone and disconsolate.

"They think they can pull her through," said the former vaguely.

"Curse 'em," grated Eddie; "they've *got* to do it. If there is the least prospect of her dying, General, I must insist that the wedding day be moved forward. I'll—I'll marry her to-day. By Jove, it might go a long way toward reducing her temperature."

"Impossible! We shall stick to the original agreement."

"Confound you, I believe you are hoping she'll die before the eleventh of November. It would be just like you, General Gamble."

"I'm not hoping for anything of the sort, sir,"

thundered the other. "But, if it *should* happen—" He did not finish the sentence, but there was a green light in his eyes.

Eddie was silent for many minutes.

"And if she *should* die, where do I come in, or get off, or whatever is the proper thing to say in the circumstances? It wouldn't be fair to me, General Gamble. You know it wouldn't. It would be a damned outrage. Here am I, a devoted lover, eager to make her happy—to *make her last moments* happy ones, mind you, and you sit there and deny her the consolation of—"

"All's fair in love, my boy," said the General blandly.

"Rats!"

"Martha wasn't strong enough to stand the excitement. It was like a sudden and frightful change in the weather. Her constitution couldn't fight it off."

"Constitution? Good Lord!"

"We ought to make allowances, my boy."

"I am in no position to make allowances. Are these doctors any good?"

"The best in New York City."

"And the nurses? Everything depends on good nursing."

"They are real Canadians."

"General, up to the time I was eleven years old I said my prayers every night. I'm going to begin again to-night," said Eddie solemnly, as he passed his hand across his brow.

The days went by with monotonous similarity. Bright or dark, wet or dry, they looked the same to Eddie Ten Eyck. At first he had been permitted to visit her once or twice a day, staying for a few minutes on each occasion. After a while the visits were stopped by the doctor's order. But still he haunted the Gamble mansion. He waylaid the doctor; he bribed or coerced the nurses; he watched the sick-room door with the eye of a hungry dog; he partook inordinately of the General's liquors. Martha was delirious, that much he was able to gather by persistent inquiry. She seemed obsessed with the idea that she and Eddie were to keep house in Heaven, with two cherubs and a hypodermic syringe.

Mrs. Gamble was deeply touched and not a little surprised by the devotion of her daughter's fiancé. She turned to him in these hours of despair and gave to him a large share of her pity and consolation. She asked him to pray for Martha. He said he had been praying for some one else nearly all his life, but henceforth would put in a word for Martha.

The wedding day was near at hand when an unexpected and alarming complication set in. The doctors were hurriedly gathered in consultation. There was a crisis. One of the nurses confided to Mr. Ten Eyck that there was no hope, but the other declared that if the patient survived the eighth of November she would "be out of the woods." The eighth was three days off. Those three days were spent by Eddie in a state of fearful suspense. He implored Providence and Fate to stand by him until after the elev-

enth. He went so far as to add a couple of days to include the thirteenth, not being superstitious. The night of the eighth was a memorable one. No one in the Gamble house went to bed. The ninth came and then the doctors appeared with glad tidings. The crisis was past and there was every chance in the world for the patient to recover, unless of course, some unforeseen complication intervened.

Eddie staggered out to the stables and performed a dance of joy.

"What's her temperature?" he demanded of one of the grooms, absently repeating a question he had asked five thousand times during the past few weeks. "I beg your pardon, Smith." Then he hurried back to the house. Meeting one of the doctors he gripped him by the arm.

"Is she sure to live, doc—doctor?"

"Forever," said the doctor, meaning to comfort him.

"No!" gasped Eddie.

"Let me congratulate you, Mr. Ten Eyck. She is quite rational now and—pardon me if I repeat a sick-room secret—she declares that there shall be no postponement of the wedding. She is superstitious about postponements."

Eddie hesitated. "Ahem! Is—is she emaciated?"

"No more than might be expected."

"I—I hope she hasn't wasted very much."

"Skin and bones," said the doctor with the most professional bluntness.

Eddie mopped his brow. "You—you don't mean

it! See here, doctor, you ought to advise very strongly against the—er—marriage at this time. Tell her it would kill her. The shock, I mean. I am willing to wait—*God knows*, I am only too willing to wait—until she is strong and well and herself once more. Tell her—”

“Perhaps you would better talk it over with her father, Mr. Ten Eyck. I am not—”

“Her father—” began Eddie, but caught himself up.

“I would not answer for her safety if a postponement were even suggested. Her heart is set on it, my dear fellow. She will be strong enough to go through with it.”

“But I want to be married in church.”

“I daresay you will agree with me when I say that your feelings are not to be considered in a crisis of this kind,” said the doctor coldly, and moved away.

At noon on the eleventh Martha awoke from a sound and restful sleep. Sweet lassitude enveloped her, but her mind went groping for something that had been troubling her in a vague sort of way for the last forty-eight hours.

“Is it the eleventh?” she whispered, stretching out her hand to the watchful nurse.

“Yes, my dear. Now try to go to sleep again—”

“Where is Mr. Ten Eyck?”

“Sh!”

“What time is it?”

“Now don’t worry about the time—”

“Is it night or day?”

"It is noon."

"I am to be married at eight o'clock this evening, Miss Feeney."

"Yes, yes, I know," soothingly.

"You might send word to Mr. Ten Eyck that I shall be ready. He may forget the ring unless you tell him that—there—is—to be—no post—" She went to sleep in the middle of postponement.

While the nurses were preparing her for the ceremony, General Gamble sent word into the sick-room that the doctor desired her correct weight—for scientific purposes.

The patient, too weak to help herself, was lifted upon the scales, where she remained long enough for it to be seen that she weighed seventy-three pounds and eight ounces. She was then hustled into bed, but seemed to be in even better spirits than before, confiding to the nurses that she knew Mr. Ten Eyck was partial to slender women, and that if she had anything to do with it she'd never weigh more than one hundred and ten again, "as long as she lived."

"One hundred and ten is a lovely weight, don't you think, Miss Feeney?" she asked.

Miss Feeney was feeling her pulse. The other nurse was trying to stick a mouth thermometer between the patient's lips.

"It is a much lovelier weight than seventy-three," said Miss Feeney gently.

The General, in the privacy of his bed-chamber, reduced the pounds to ounces and found that Martha, in her present state, represented eight hundred and

eighty-four ounces. He could not suppress a chuckle, even though he felt very mean about it. She was worth \$16,972 in gold. Her illness had cost him approximately \$2,000 in doctors' fees, *et cetera*, but it had cost Eddie Ten Eyck \$21,911 in pure gold, with twenty cents over in silver.

It is said that the bridegroom almost collapsed when he looked for the first time upon his emaciated investment. It was worse than he had expected. She was literally "skin and bones."

Mechanically, semi-paralysed, he made the responses to the almost staccato words of the clergyman. The ceremony was hurried through at a lively rate, but to Eddie it seemed to take hours. Her fingers felt like a closed fan in his own pulseless hand. He replied "I do" and "I will" without really being aware of the fact, and all the time he was gazing blankly at her, trying to remember where he had seen her before.

Away back in the dim, forgotten ages there was a robust, squat, valuable figure; but—this! His brain reeled. He was being married to an utter stranger. His loss was incalculable.

We will speed over the ensuing months. It goes without saying that Martha became well and strong and abominably vigorous in the matter of appetite. Her days of convalescence— But why go into them? They are interesting only to the person who is emerging from a period of suffering and fasting. Why dwell upon the reflections of Eddie Ten Eyck as he saw an erstwhile stranger transformed into an old

acquaintance before his very eyes? Why go into the painful details attending the stealthy payment of nearly \$17,000 by the party of the first part to the party of the second part, and why tell of the uses to which the latter was compelled to put this meagre fortune almost immediately after acquiring it? No one cares to be harassed by these miserable, mawkish details.

One really needs to know but one thing: the bridegroom soon stood shorn of all his ill-gotten gains, unless we except the wife of whom no form of adversity could rob him.

A month after the wedding, Eddie was eagerly awaiting the fourth quarterly instalment of his allowance. He was out of debt, it is true, but he never had been poorer in all his life. The thing that appalled him most was the fact that he had unlimited credit and did not possess the courage to take advantage of it. He could have borrowed right and left; he could have run up stupendous accounts; he could have lived like a lord. But Martha, before she was really able to sit up in bed, began to talk about something in a cottage,—something that made him turn pale with desperation,—and bread and cheese and kisses, entirely with an eye to thrift and what Eddie considered a nose for squalor. He couldn't imagine anything more squalid than a subsistence on the three commodities mentioned. In fact, he preferred starvation.

Martha harped for hours at a stretch on how economically she could conduct their small establish-

ment, once they got into the house he had bound himself to buy in his days of affluence. She seemed to take it for granted that she would be obliged to skimp and pinch in order to get along on what Eddie would be able to earn.

"Our meat and grocery bills will be almost nothing, Eddie dear," she said one day, with an enthusiasm that discouraged him. "You see, I mean to keep my figure, now that I've got it. I sha'n't eat a thing for days at a time. We'll have no meat, nor potatoes, nor sugar—"

"Just bread and cheese," said he wanly.

"And something else," she added coquettishly.

"Kisses are fattening," he said.

"Goodness! Who ever told you that?" she cried in dismay.

"A well-known specialist," he said, his mind adrift.

"Well, there is one thing sure, Eddie," she declared firmly; "we will not go into debt for anything. We positively must keep out of debt. I won't have you worrying about money matters."

"I'm not likely to," said he with conviction.

He then began to watch for signs of decrepitude in the General.

As soon as Martha was strong enough to travel, her step-father suggested that they go South for the winter instead of opening the little house down the street. He went so far as to offer to pay the expenses of the trip as a sort of belated wedding gift.

Eddie objected. He said that his real estate busi-

ness was in such a state that he couldn't afford to leave it for a day.

"I didn't know you *had* a business," exclaimed the General.

"I am making arrangements to take up a Government claim in Alaska," said his son-in-law grimly.

"Great Scott!"

"I'm going to some place where I can *dig* for gold."

"Are you in earnest?"

"Bitterly."

"And—and would you subject Martha to the rigours of an Alaskan winter in—"

"Inasmuch as we shall have to subsist on snow-balls until you pass in your cheques, General, I think we'd better go where they are fresh and plentiful."

Fortunately for the bride and groom, everybody that was anybody in Essex gave them a wedding present. Not a few, in a fever of exultation, gave beyond their means, and a great many of them with unintentional irony gave pickle dishes. By the time they were ready to go into their new home, it was cosily, even handsomely furnished. The General, contrite of heart, spent money lavishly in trying to make the home so attractive for Eddie that he wouldn't be likely to desert it for something worse.

The groom's sense of humour was only temporarily dulled. He noted signs of its awakening when he assisted in the unpacking of four cheval mirrors, gifts to the bride from persons who may or may not have been in collusion but who certainly wanted

Martha to see herself as others saw her, and, as it turned out, from all sides.

The glow of health—an almost superhuman health—increased in the countenance of Mrs. Edward Ten Eyck. Her hair was a bit slow in restoring itself, and a shade or two darker, but on the other hand, despite all she could do to prevent it, she resumed her natural proportions with a rapidity that was sickening.

It was not long before her figure was unquestionably her own.

Eddie tried to conceal his dismay. He even tried to drown it. Their first quarrel grew out of her objection to the presence of intoxicating liquors in the house.

“I don’t approve of whiskey,” she said flatly.

“But you had it at your house.”

“You forget that he was only my step-father.”

“He isn’t in the past tense yet,” said he bitterly.

“I’ve always maintained that whiskey should be used for medicinal purposes only.”

“Then please don’t worry about it,” said he curtly.

“I’ve ordered a barrel of it.”

“For—for medicinal purposes?”

“Strictly.”

She studied his face with uneasy alarm in her eyes.

“You—don’t feel as though you were going to be ill, do you, dear?”

He moved to the opposite side of the table, involuntarily lifting his left elbow as if to shield him-

self. She stopped half-way. Then he laughed awkwardly and turned the subject.

One day he reached the startling conclusion that she was getting heavier than she had ever been before. It required days of contemplation, scrutiny, and development of purpose before he could ask her to step onto the scales at the meat market.

A cold perspiration started on his forehead as he moved the balance along the bar and found it would be necessary to use the two-hundred pound weight instead of the one-hundred, the fifty, and divers small ones that had been sufficient in days of yore.

She weighed two hundred and three pounds.

At nine o'clock that night some one took him home from the Essex Club, and Martha was in hysterics until the doctor, summoned with haste and vehemence, assured her that her husband was not dead.

The approach of springtime found Eddie in a noticeably run-down condition. Friends and acquaintances began to remark that he was "going to seed in a hurry," or "he's awfully run down at the heel," or "I've never seen such a change in a man."

He was no longer the gay, whilom, inconsequent man about town. The best proof of this was his utter lack of pride in the matter of dress and his carelessness in respect to his personal appearance. Once he had been the beau-ideal of the town. Nowadays he slouched about the streets with a cigarette drooping listlessly between his lips, his face unshaven, his clothes unpressed and dusty. There was always a hunted, far-away look in his eyes.

Habitué of the Club began to notice that he was once more making mathematical calculations on the backs of envelopes or the margins of newspapers and magazines. No one pretended to explain this queer habit of his, but they observed that his efforts represented sums in multiplication. Occasionally, as if to throw them off the track, he did a sum in subtraction, and there were frequent lapses into simplified addition.

It was noted, however, that the numerals one, nine, decimal, two and a cipher, invariably in that sequence, figured somewhere in every calculation.

General Gamble could have solved the mystery, but he maintained a rigid silence. In his heart, the old schemer nurtured a fear that sooner or later Eddie would commit suicide or run away, either of which would signify the return of Martha to the mansion she had deserted for a cottage. And he knew that if she ever came back it would be as a permanent visitor.

He encountered his son-in-law frequently at unexpected times and in unusual places, and was never without the feeling that the young man eyed him balefully. He could feel the intensity of that unwavering gaze for hours after meeting Eddie. It was an ardent, searching look that seemed to question his right to survive the day.

After such meetings, the General was wont to survey himself long and fearsomely in the first mirror or show window that presented itself. He began to wonder if he was in failing health. At times he thought he discerned signs of approaching decrepi-

tude, but his doctor assured him that he was never healthier or happier than he appeared to be at this particular period in his life.

Still, he could not shake off the rather ghastly feeling that Eddie was secretly praying that his days were numbered.

One day at the Club he complained of a severe pain in his back, and the very next day he was shocked to find his son-in-law dressed in sombre black with a strip of crape around his arm. Immediately on seeing the General in his usual state of health, Eddie solemnly removed the band from his sleeve and, carefully rolling it up, stuck it into his waistcoat pocket.

"I'm saving it for a rainy day," said Eddie with a cold-blooded smile.

"Good Heaven!" said the General, and at once felt the pain return to his back.

"Have you seen Martha lately?" asked Eddie, tapping the bell on the table.

"Oh, yes," said the General, settling a little deeper into his chair. "She is looking remarkably well."

"Do you know what she weighs at present?"

"Of course not. She took the scales over to your house. Besides, I don't care a hang."

"Day before yesterday she weighed two hundred and ninety-eight pounds." His voice rose to a shrill screech. "It's a blamed outrage!" He dropped his chin into his hands and went on muttering vaguely, his eyes glued to the top button of the General's waistcoat.

"By Jove, she is doing well."

"She can hardly walk. If she keeps on, she won't be able to see, either. Her eyes are almost lost. I screwed up the courage to take a long look at her to-day. She has lost her neck entirely and I haven't the remotest idea where her ears are."

"I—I *do* feel sorry for you, Eddie," cried the General, moved by unexpected compunction.

Eddie rambled on. "Sometimes I sit down and actually watch her grow. You can notice it if you look steadily for a given time."

The two sat stiff and silent for many minutes. Eddie stole a sly glance at his companion's ruddy face.

"You are a remarkably well preserved man, General," he ventured speculatively. "Would you mind telling me your age?"

"I am seventy-one, Eddie, if it is any encouragement to you," said the General eagerly.

"You look good for another ten years," said Eddie hopelessly.

"I am a little worried about my heart," prevaricated the General. He meant to be magnanimous. Eddie did not look up, but his eyes began to blink rapidly. "There is heart disease in the family, you know."

"Then maybe Martha has—er—has—"

"Has what, my son?"

"I forgot. She is only your step-daughter. I was worried for a moment, that's all."

In the fall of the year, Eddie announced to his

father-in-law that Martha was tipping the beam at three hundred and fourteen pounds, three ounces, and increasing daily. The General gave vent to an uneasy laugh, whereupon Eddie, mistaking his motive, launched into a tirade that ended with the frantic wish that the old man would hurry up and die.

"Now, Eddie, don't talk like that! I have about made up my mind to do something handsome for you and Martha. I have practically decided to make her an allowance for clothing and so forth—"

"Clothing!" groaned Eddie. "She doesn't want clothes. What could she do with 'em? I am the one who needs clothes. Look at me. Look at the frayed edges and see how I shine in the back. There is a patch or two that you can't see. I put those patches on myself, too. Martha is so darned fat she can't hold a pair of trousers in her lap. Moreover, she can't sew with anything smaller than a crochet needle. Look at me! I am growing a beard so that people can't see my Adam's apple. That's how poor and thin I'm getting to be. Now just listen a minute; I'll give you a few figures that will paralyse you."

He jerked out his lead pencil and with the rapidity of a lightning calculator multiplied, added, and subtracted.

"She is worth \$72,403.20 to-day. What do you think of that? Prove the figures for yourself. Here's the pencil."

"I don't care to—"

"The day of the wedding," went on Eddie wildly, "she weighed in at \$16,972.80, I think. See what I

mean? She's bulling the market and I can't realise a cent on her. She's gone up \$55,430 in less than a year. Suffering Isaac! Why couldn't she have weighed that much a year ago?" He was so furious that he chopped off his words in such a way that they sounded like the barking of a dog.

The General pushed back his chair in alarm.

"Calm yourself, Eddie."

"Oh, I'm calm enough."

"Martha will be a very rich woman when I die, and you won't have to—"

"That sounds beautiful. But don't you see that she's getting so blamed fat that she's liable to tip over some day and die before I can find any one to help me set her up again? And if that should happen, will you kindly tell me *where I would come in?*"

"You are a heartless, mercenary scoundrel," gasped the General.

"Well, you would be sore, too, if this thing had happened to you," whined Eddie. He sprang to his feet suddenly. "By thunder, I can't stand it a day longer. Good-bye, General. I'm going to skip out."

"Skip out! Leave her? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes. She can always find a happy home with her mother and you. I'm off to the—"

"For Heaven's sake," cried the General hoarsely, "don't do that, Eddie. Don't you dare do anything like that. I—I—I am sure we can arrange something between us. I'm not a stingy, hard-hearted man, and you know it. You deserve relief. You deserve compensation. I am your father-in-law and, damme,

I'll not go back on you in your time of need. I'll make up the amount you have already lost, 'pon my soul I will, Eddie. Stand by your guns, that's all I ask."

A seraphic expression came into Eddie's face. "When?" he demanded.

"Immediately. Can you come to my house this evening? Alone, of course."

"I should say I can!" shouted Eddie, growing two inches taller in an instant. He took the package of crape from his pocket and threw it into a cuspidor. Then he sighed profoundly. "Gad, have you ever felt like another man, General? It's great."

As the General was past the point where he could risk saying another word, he maintained a strenuous silence.

Eddie indulged in an expansive grin. "You asked if I could come alone. That's the only way I can come. If you ever expect to see Martha, General, you will have to come to my house to do so. Do you remember that saying about Mahomet and the mountain?"

THE MAID AND THE BLADE

THE MAID AND THE BLADE

Over two centuries ago. Virginia, fair Virginia, in her most rugged, uncouth state, yet queen of all the colonies, rich in the dignity of an advanced settlement, glorious in prophecies and ambitions; the favoured ward of England's sovereigns, the paradise of her royal pillagers, the birthplace of American Freedom.

Jamestown was in the throes of a savage struggle, confined not to herself alone, but spreading to the farthestmost ends of the apparently unbounded state. The capital fight was on, the contest waging between the town in which grew Bacon's rebellion and Williamsburg, in which William and Mary College had just been born, an infant venture that seemed but a mockery in the wilds. Boisterous, boasting Jamestown, since the rule of Berkeley and the unfortunate overthrow of Bacon, had resumed a state of composure which she had not known in the five preceding decades, and was beginning to look upon herself as the undisputed metropolis of the wilderness. The impudence of Williamsburg, with her feeble scholastic claims, was not even condemned—it was ignored.

The crude fort at Jamestown held a merry gar-

rison, the Governor having impressed upon royalty across the sea the importance of troops in a land where unexpected rebellions against authority might succeed the partially triumphant uprising against Sir William in 1676. Bacon's death in the October of that year had lost the fight which had been fairly won, and it was wisdom which told the new Governor that troops were essential, even in time of peace.

The commander of the garrison was Colonel Fortune. The number and quality of his troops are not important factors in this tale.

Among the men were a dozen or more subalterns, fresh from England, undergoing their first rough work in the forests of Virginia. In this fledgling crowd were young Grafton, afterward a general; Mooney, Vedder, Holcraft and others, whose names, with those of their Virginia companions went into colonial history.

Near the fort were the homes of the officers, the Governor's residence being but a short distance down the rough, winding lane, which was dignified by the name of street. Colonel Fortune's home was the handsomest, the merriest of them all, a typical frontier mansion. A mansion of those days could be little more than a cottage in these, yet the Colonel's was far brighter, gayer than the palace of to-day. In his house gathered chivalrous subalterns from English homes, stalwart Virginians of inherited gallantry, the men and women from whom sprung the first families of that blue blood which all Americans cherish lovingly and proudly.

His board was more hospitable than that of the Governor, his favours were coveted more eagerly even than were those of his superior. Stern, exacting, yet affable and courteous, he was the idol of a people whose hatred for those who ruled them had wrought ruin more than once. Mrs. Fortune, a lady of gentle birth closely related, in fact, to a certain branch of nobility, shared the power of her husband.

But there was a colonial queen whose reign was of more consequence to the youth of Jamestown than was that of the august person across the sea. She was queen of hearts, this daughter of theirs, airy Kate Fortune. Daintiest maid in all the land, famed for her wit, her follies, her merry loveliness, her dimples and her sunshine, she was the wildest tempter who ever laid unconscious siege against man's indifference. The English officers called her an angel, the more deferential Virginians moaned that she was a witch, yet would not have burned her for the whole universe. On the contrary, they sacrificed themselves to the worship of her craft. War and strife were forgotten, the treacheries of the Indians were minimised, and a score or more of dreamers, awake or asleep, found their minds so full of dainty Kate that thought of else could work no means of entrance. In that year of our Lord, Jamestown was a veritable cauldron of rivals, fair suitors all, some bold, some timid, none hopeful.

Strange as it may appear to those who live these two centuries later, there were no jealousies, no bitterness among them. In those good days the favoured

man's best friends were his beaten rivals. Kate's kingdom was not large, was not glittering, but her sceptre was mighty. It was made of tenderness and beauty.

For two months the Governor's nephew had been her most ardent admirer, notwithstanding the fact that he had been in Virginia but sixty days. His surrender had been instantaneous.

Ordinarily the nephew of the Governor, who was a lord of the realm, might be considered a superior rival, but in this instance he was not even feared. He had come to Jamestown with exalted ideas. He dressed better, talked better and lived better, and he seemed to hold every man in the colony in disdain. Friendly, courteous even to the lowest soldier, he still gave forth the impression that he was condescending, not alone to those beneath, but to those above him. That this scion, this self-ordered perfect man, should have drifted to the colonies from the drawing-rooms of London only to fall in love with Kate Fortune seemed incredible.

Moreover, he had refused to wrestle in the contests at the fort, and had failed to fight the man who had warmly called him a coward in the presence of others.

Tales of his conduct in that and other exhibitions had been spread, and the good-looking young officer eventually became a laughing-stock. One day, however, he pulled the nose of an impudent lieutenant. When the red-faced lieutenant insisted upon satisfaction with swords he merely turned pale and ignored the challenge.

"I came here to fight the Indians, not to kill my comrades," he had said, and a disdainful laugh followed, bringing a flush to his face as he walked away.

Kate Fortune rather admired the easy elegance of the stranger, yet despised his lack of courage, the story having come to her promptly enough. She began to treat him coldly and he was at last driven to feel that he was her most unwelcome suitor. One day he bluntly asked her why she treated him so unkindly.

"Captain Studdiford, I will be frank with you," replied the girl. "How can you expect me to admire a man who submits to the ridicule of a whole company of men, not one of whom seems able to cope with him in strength or in the experience of arms? I am the daughter of an English soldier; that should be sufficient reason for my conduct. If I have mistreated you it was because I could not help it." She saw a look of pain come and go in his flushed face, hence the hasty apology, such as it was.

"So I am an object of derision to you, as well as to them," he observed, quietly. "I shall not intrude myself again, Miss Fortune. I am brave enough to tell you, for the first time, and in the face of your evident dislike, that I love you better than I ever dreamed I could love a woman." He was turning away in apparent indifference as he concluded this strange avowal.

Kate planted herself squarely before him, her pretty, perplexed face twitching between a smile and a frown, wonder fairly popping from her curious blue eyes.

"Isn't it cowardly to say that when you know how I feel? You are safe in confessing something that you already know I cannot consider," she said.

"I would rather not discuss it. You may treat it as a jest, as cowardice, or what you like. I cannot control your treatment of the best thing an honest man has to give a woman." It left the girl standing on the tips of her toes in sheer surprise. She was at no time a dignified queen, but she was an inquisitive one.

"But, Captain, you must not go away fearing that I—I shall treat lightly what you have said to me," she murmured.

"Fearing? Why should I fear your ridicule more than that of others? You are brighter, more bewitching, more tantalising than any woman I have ever known—you are maddening—do you hear? Ah, I crave your pardon for so far forgetting myself as to dwell upon a matter which I should have forgotten in your displeasure. By the way, I should like to tell you why I will not accommodate these young fools with a duel, why I have controlled my natural desire to resent their insults. I have fought one duel and I have killed a man. These men would have no more chance than that man had. You may tell them so. Farewell!"

She watched his tall figure move from her dooryard and disappear in the direction of the river. Then Kate sat down in the window and gazed half regretfully toward the opening in the timber through which he had passed.

It began to occur to her that Captain Studdiford was somehow the superior of any man she had ever seen. She felt a joy that he had fought a duel, although the thought that he had killed a man caused her to shudder. With the shudder, however, came the relieved feeling that he had not been the victim. Her face flushed faintly, too, as she recalled his strange avowal of love.

That same night a half dozen young men, with as many maids, dropped in to spend the chilly evening before the Colonel's roaring fires. They were toasting apples and chattering gaily when Kate suddenly turned to a young Virginian, and with taunting eyes, cried:

"Morton Trask, I know why Captain Studdiford would not fight a duel with you."

"So do I," responded Trask. "Because he feared me."

"'Twas no such reason. He says he does not choose to kill anything but Indians." A big laugh went up from the men.

"The fool! Did he say that to you?" cried Trask.

"He truly did; and, besides, he has fought and killed a man."

"Ho! Ho!" laughed Trask, disdainfully.

"Did he stab him in the dark?" questioned Farring.

"He lies if he says he fought aught save a boy," sneered Trask.

"Yet he pulled your valiant nose until it was red for near a week," said Kate, cheerily.

"Oh, would that I were at him—the coward!" cried Trask, white and trembling.

"You can pull his nose when next you meet him, Morton, it is your turn, you know," said Kate, laughingly, and Trask glared at the burning logs in angry silence.

"Please forgive me, Morton; I did not mean to hurt you by recalling a previous injury," cried Kate, and Trask's injury increased with her contrition.

"I cannot see why you defend the Captain, Miss Fortune," ventured Farring.

"Why not? He will not defend himself."

"But you surely cannot approve a coward?"

"Are you sure he is a coward?"

"I should consider myself one under the circumstances, I believe," he replied, evasively.

"Would it not be cowardly to fight Morton Trask if he knew he could kill him?"

"Bah!" came from the angry Trask.

"He could, at least, have given Trask satisfaction for an insult," said Varney. Kate wavered.

"That's true," she said; "he should have been a gentleman. Still, that does not prove him a coward."

"I'll wager that I can prove him a coward," observed Lieutenant Holmes. "And safely, too."

"'Twere wise to do it safely," supplemented Miss Fortune.

"One time at home we exposed a boasting captain, who would have had us think him the bravest man on earth—"

"But that does not seem to be Captain Studdiford's object," interrupted Kate.

"True," went on Holmes, "but that has nothing to do with it. This captain was one night approached by five of his fellow officers, disguised as highwaymen, and despite his declarations that he had fought dozens of such men, he ran like a hound, screaming murder all the way. Why not test your captain's courage as we tested ours, Miss Fortune?"

"In the first place, I could not be a very impressive highwayman, and in the second place, he might shoot."

"You have plenty of men at your command who would serve as Indians for such an experiment," speculated Varney.

"Egad! we all would!" exclaimed Holmes.

"So you might!" she cried. "He would be willing to kill you if you were Indians."

"We might as well give up the plan, for we could not force him to leave town without a bodyguard," sneered Trask.

"Fie! That is easy. Miss Fortune could ask him to ride with her into the forest and he would go blindly enough," said Holmes.

"I?" cried Kate, blushing to think of herself in that position after Studdiford's proclamation. "I could not—would not do such a thing. Prove him a coward, but do not ask me to help you."

"Holmes is right, and Miss Fortune should be willing to make the test. She is his defender; she cannot refuse to satisfy herself of her error in this harmless,

yet effective way," announced big Farring, and every member of the party laid siege against Kate's faltering opposition. The fun of it all finally appealed to her and she rather timidly agreed to the proposition. How could she ask him to ride with her after what had passed between them? He would think her unwomanly and, strangely enough, with that thought she began to feel that she must have his good opinion. Yet she went, half dubiously, into the plot to prove a coward of the man she was beginning to admire.

The details of the scheme were submitted by the men, and were as follows: Kate was to ask him to ride horseback with her to "Big Fork," five miles through the forest, on some near afternoon, and the men were to bedeck themselves as Indians, attack them, take her from his custody and hurry her off into apparent captivity, whilst he trembled with fear and inaction.

"But suppose he should happen to be disappointing and shoot somebody," objected Lucy Gaines.

"Oh, he must have no chance to do that," said Varney. "Miss Fortune can induce him to discharge his pistols in some feat of marksmanship and we will swoop down before he can reload them."

"For shame!" cried Kate. "How could that be a fair test of bravery? An unarmed man against five brawny Indians! I'll have none of it. His pistols must remain undisturbed."

"But—good heavens!—he may kill us all," cried Trask.

"Well, how else is he to prove his courage? You must take your chances, gentlemen, with your coward.

If he is a coward you need not fear his pistols, though he had a dozen; if he is not, then you may have to run from them."

"Allow us to capture you and offer him the privilege of fighting for your liberty, choosing his own weapons. If he agrees to fight for you, instead of taking his proffered freedom, we will leave the field to him and you may call him hero. That is fair, is it not?" proposed Farring.

"You will not hurt him?" asked Kate doubtfully.

"Hurt him? We shall not even catch him. He will leave you and fly for his life!" cried Trask.

"I tell you now, gentlemen, if he stands the test and disproves your taunts against his valour, my respect for him will be far more than you can ever hope to inspire. Yet, after all, it will be a diversion—it will be fun to see how he will act," mused the fair plotter.

It required all of Kate's courage and a dismal sacrifice of pride to suggest the ride to Captain Studdiford, but she did it the next morning, stopping him near the fort after having walked not thirty feet behind for more than two hundred yards. She was a trifle insecure as to her own valour in this preliminary step.

The rosiness of her cheeks might have been by others attributed to the chill of the December morn, but she knew they were the flames from an inward fire.

Captain Studdiford's heart thumped unusually fast as he looked down into the piquant face and big blue eyes, which for the first time since he had known her, wore a gleam bordering on embarrassment.

They were very soft and timid this morning—there was something appealing in their tempting depths.

“May I not walk with you? I am going your way,” were her first words as she reached his side.

“Whither, pray?”

“Oh, to—” and here she blushed, for in truth she had no destination—“to Anna Corwin’s,” she concluded in relief.

“But Mistress Corwin lives back yonder. How came you to be going this way?”

“Did I say Anna Corwin?”

“If I am not deaf.”

“Then I must have meant some one else; to be sure I did—how queer of me. I am going to Lucy’s. You cannot say, sir, that she does not live in this direction. I’ll not walk with you if you are bound to be particular, though.” Her little ears were very red.

“I beg you to forgive me and allow me to walk with you,” cried the Captain eagerly.

“I like that much better. No matter if I were going to Anna’s and chose a roundabout way, you should not be so impolite as to remonstrate. As a rule, Captain, the men prefer the roundabout way.”

“Be it miles I would walk it with thee,” cried he, smiling at her merry vanity.

“Oh, would you do that?” she asked, suddenly seeing her way clear. Yet, in spite of all, her composure deserted her and she blurted it out, turning red again.

“I am dying to ride to ‘Big Fork’ to-morrow, but I have no one to accompany me. Would you like to

go?" Then to herself, "What a fool he thinks me!"

"Gladly; but, are we sure there are no stray Indians about?" he asked, rather quickly.

"He is afraid," she thought, with strange disappointment. "If you are afraid, we will not go," she said a trifle coldly.

"Afraid? Not for myself, but for you. We will go if you like, and I should rejoice to meet all of the Indians in Virginia if it will please you."

So they made their plans, and she was so loth to leave him that he was forced to remind her that they had passed the home of Lucy Gaines a full furlong or more. He left her at the door, his heart exultant, hers all a-flutter.

The next afternoon the two rode forth from Jamestown and into the forest, following the well-made road which led to the westward beneath the red and yellowing oaks. Half an hour previous to their departure five young men had ridden from the home of Lucy Gaines, strange bundles strapped to their saddles. Above all things, they had cautioned Kate to demand the Captain's proof of marksmanship at a point near Big Fork.

It was with some consternation, notwithstanding all the plotting, that Kate observed the big pistols at the Captain's side and the heavy sword which jangled against his leg. That jangling sword gave her the tremors, and she cast many furtive glances toward its chain and scabbard. At last she was compelled to ask:

"How can you, I pray, use such a monstrous sword, Captain Studdiford? It must have been made for a giant."

"It was; it was my great-great-grandfather's over a century ago. See! It is serviceable, even in my weak hand." He pulled the gleaming blade, long and heavy, from its scabbard, and swept it downward through the air so fiercely that it resembled a wide sheet of silver. Kate's blue eyes grew wide with apprehension, a cold chill seized upon her and her ruddy face paled. He returned the weapon to its sheath with such a forceful crash that she started violently in her saddle, her little teeth clicking in sheer fright.

"I could cleave a man's skull in twain as easily as you can cut an apple. Would that we could meet a warlike Indian that I could show you how it merits my praise."

"Goodness!" gasped Kate hopelessly. "You would not strike—a—a—man with it, would you?"

"If he were an enemy. For you, loved one, I could cut down an army." Their horses drew more closely side by side and the fierce, strong hand was gently laid upon her trembling fingers. Tenderly clasping the little one the big one raised it until it touched the lips of him who leaned across to kiss it. Their eyes met as he raised his head. His were full of love, hers with a pleading dread, the uncertain quiver between love and fear. Without a word he dropped the hand, suddenly sick at heart.

"I could die for her and she despises me," he groaned to himself.

"Oh, what have I—have we done?" she thought, a thousand fears gathering in her heart. "He is no coward and he will kill one of them! How can I tell him—how can I save their lives? He will despise me! That awful sword! A man's skull! Oh, dear! He called me loved one! How big and strong he is! He called me—how can I keep him from using the sword? The pistols I can manage and—perhaps they will not be there. He will kill them all—horror upon horror! What have I done? Oh!" the last exclamation was so loud and so sudden that the pale Captain turned quickly.

"What is it? What is it?"

She laughed wildly, even gleefully, almost in the face of her companion.

"Nothing—nothing at all!" she cried.

"I am glad to have afforded you amusement, Mistress Fortune. You may tear my heart to shreds."

Her manner changed instantly. Tears flew to the blue eyes and her hand crept toward him.

"Forgive me, pray, Captain Studdiford, I—I did not mean to hurt you. I—I—am very foolish, very unkind. You must hate me," she faltered.

"Hate you! How could I? You do not love me—why should I have hoped? I can but blame myself." Her hand had fallen to her side because he had not touched it. "And it is our last afternoon together."

"Last?" she repeated, faintly.

"Yes; for I shall not see you again."

"Oh—you—you—do not mean that!"

"I have asked to be transferred to Williamsburg. I—I have not one friend in Jamestown; why should I stay here?" he cried bitterly.

"But you have," she exclaimed, eagerly; "you have. I am your friend."

"Friend! That is not what I ask of you," he said, almost gruffly.

Silence, broken only by the clatter of the hoofs upon the road followed his words. In her confusion she had forgotten the terrible sword, but it recurred to her, and, with it, the thought which had given birth to her untimely mirth, the thought that was to lead her from the chief predicament into which she had been cast. She would ask the Captain to turn back to Jamestown at once, avoiding the possibility of conflict.

"Captain Studdiford, I believe we had better turn back." Her face grew crimson beneath his calm gaze.

"As you like. You will grant me time to adjust my saddle girth; it is slipping," he said coolly, dismounting without another word.

They were fully three miles from the village, and in a dense piece of forest. On either side of the narrow road grew the thickest of underbrush with the great, gaunt trees stretching above like silent sentinels. The girl's mind was chaos; her thoughts were changing and interchanging like leaves before the whirling wind. She knew that she admired this man, and that something even sweeter was beginning to throb its

way into her heart. A half smile came to her troubled face as she thought of the war-painted plotters two miles away, waiting to make a coward of her hero. A touch of remorse came to her as she remembered her part in the play, and that the plot would have been carried out had she not seen the great swing of that fearful sword. What havoc it would have wrought! And he was to leave Jamestown! Without a friend, he had said. How could he say that?

In the midst of these varying thoughts she allowed her softening eyes to wander from him toward the trees above and the straggling brush beneath their knotty limbs. A suppressed scream called the Captain's attention to her staring eyes. They were blinking with consternation.

Deep in the underbrush she had seen the form of an Indian warrior! Horrors! The sword!

"What do you see?" cried he, staring toward the now deserted brush.

"Nothing—nothing!" she gasped. "Yes—I mean, that red bird! See? Do shoot it for me—I must have it! Isn't it beautiful?" She was excitedly pointing toward a red bird in the top branches of a big oak.

He drew his pistols and deliberately aimed with one of them. The shot missed and the bird darted away.

"Oh, goodness!" she cried. "Try the other one!"

"But the bird is gone."

"Is it? So it is—but, quick! See if you can cut off that twig up there—the one with three red leaves.

I wager you cannot! Quick, and then we will ride for home."

"Why are you so excited?"

"I am not the least bit excited—I never am! Why do you not shoot at that twig?"

"You try it," he surprised her by saying, pushing a pistol into her hand. Without a word or aim she blazed away at the sky and his firearms were useless. She handed the smoking pistol to him with a laugh.

"Would it not be awful if Indians came upon us?" she cried, with strange exultation. "But mount, and race with me to the spring!"

As the Captain placed his foot in the stirrup a yell burst from the thicket, an arrow whizzed above their heads, and a half-a-dozen fierce warriors were dashing toward them.

"Do not use your sword!" she screamed.

Before the bewildered soldier could catch his breath an ugly brave was in the road, not ten feet away, knife in hand. Out whizzed the sword!

Kate screamed in agony, clasping her hand over her eyes.

"They are friends! Do not strike!"

But it was too late. The streak of steel cut the air. A sickening thud, a gurgling howl, and the assailant fell, his head half severed from his body. An instant later the big Englishman was in his saddle. A second slash and an Indian at his side went down beneath the ancestral blade!

The two horses plunged forward as a brawny red-skin grasped her arm and she felt herself being

dragged to the ground. Then a hand clasped her other arm, a big form leaned over behind her, far across the back of her horse. She heard the hiss of something cutting the air, the crash as of splitting wood, a scream of agony and the Indian's ruthless grasp was loosened. Her horse stumbled and seemed to totter beneath her, but again that arm from aloft exerted itself and it seemed as if she were being lifted to the tree tops. Almost before she could realise it she was upon another horse, clasped in the arm of its rider, and they were off like the wind.

Suddenly she felt the form of the man who held her so closely drop forward with a groan and then straighten again slowly. Exultant yells came from behind them, several arrows whizzed past, and then naught was heard but the thunder of the horse's hoofs upon the frozen road. As her eyes opened involuntarily, terror possessing them, they fell upon the scene far behind. Two hundred yards away her own horse lay struggling in the road, two human forms stretched near it, another dragging itself to the roadside. Three feathered Indians were some fifty yards nearer, gesticulating wildly. Her brain whirled and buzzed, and—consciousness was lost!

When she regained her senses she was lying upon the ground. With feeble eyes she glanced wonderingly about. To a tree near by a horse was hitched, neath her body were the blankets from the horses and certain garments from the back of man. All was as a dream; she could account for nothing. Studdiford was leaning against the big oak, coatless and as pale

as a ghost. Deep lines stretched across his brow and down his mouth; his eyes were closed, as if in pain.

An involuntarily moan escaped her lips, and the Captain was at her side almost before it had died away. She was crying.

"Oh, what have I done! What have I done!"

"Calm yourself, dearest! You are safe—entirely so. See, we are alone, far from those devils. It is but a mile to Jamestown. Be brave and we will soon be at home," he murmured hoarsely, kneeling at her side and lifting her to a sitting posture.

"Home! I can never go home! Oh, God you do not know—you do not know!"

"There—there! Now, be quiet."

"How could you know? I am a murderess—I am the wretch! Kill me; I cannot live!" she wailed.

"Hush!" he cautioned, lovingly.

"You could not know—you did not know them, Captain Studdiford!" she cried, sitting bolt upright, glaring wildly about her, then shudderingly plunging her white face against his shoulder. "They were not Indians," she almost whispered.

"Not Indians!" he gasped.

"God forgive me—no! It was all a trick—to test your courage—forgive me—to test—to test—oh! and I allowed you to kill them!"

"Speak! Go on! What do you mean?"

"They were our friends—not Indians! My dearest friends! Oh, how is it that I am not struck dead for this? Please heaven, let me die!" she wailed.

"My God!" he exclaimed, after the first bewildering shock. "A trick—and I have killed—oh, it cannot be true!" He leaped to his feet, allowing her to fall from his side to the ground, where she lay, a wretched, shivering heap. With a ferocious oath he snatched the big sword from the ground and turned upon her, with eyes blazing, muscles quivering.

She was looking up at him, those wide blue eyes gleaming piteously.

"Kill me!" she murmured, and closed the eyes to await the stroke.

His big arm relaxed, the sword fell from his nerveless grasp, clanging to the ground.

When she reopened her eyes after an age of suspense she saw him leaning against the tree, his body shaking with sobs. A second glance and she started to her feet alarmed.

His broad back was covered with blood. Near his left shoulder the clothing was torn and an ugly, gaping wound leered at her.

"Oh," she gasped; "you—you are hurt!"

"Hurt!" he groaned. "They have killed me! You have killed me—you and your friends. I hope you—are—satisfied—with—your—see?" As he sank to the ground, he pointed feebly to the cruel arrow which he had torn from his side. It lay not far away, grim and bloody.

The horrified girl glanced at it helplessly and then at the unconscious man, unable to realise. Then she cried aloud in her agony and threw herself upon the prostrate form, moaning:

"Dead! Dead! Speak to me, Ralph—look up! I love you—I worship you! You shall not leave me!"

She kissed the pallid face, caressed the chilling head, sobbing:

"Forgive me—forgive me!"

An hour afterward the clatter of hoofs upon the road aroused her from the semi-conscious condition into which her grief had thrown her. Through the gathering darkness she saw horsemen approaching—Indian riders! A moment later they were dismounting at her side, and well-known voices were calling to her:

"Are you hurt?"

"What has happened?"

"Killed? My God!"

It was Farring, Trask and the other plotters, reeking with excitement. Their horses were wet from the fierceness with which they had been ridden.

"Do not touch him! You have killed him!" she cried, striving to shield the body from Farring's anxious touch.

"Killed him? Good God, Kate! where did you meet them?" cried Farring, as Trask pulled her from Studdiford's side.

"Are you not dead?" she finally whispered to the men.

"We? He killed three of them—split their heads! But the wretches put an arrow into him, after all. What a dreadful thing we have done! Fairly tricked him to his death!" cried poor Trask.

"Then—then it was not you?" cried Kate.

"Heavens, no! We found the Indians dragging their dead from the road, three miles back, and knew that something terrible had happened.

"Thank God! I am spared that! But he must not die—he shall not! I love him. Do you hear? I love him!"

For three weeks the victim of that ill-fated trick hung between life and death. Surgery was crude in the colonies, and the first evidence of restoration was due more to his rugged constitution than to the skill of his doctors. The poor fellow rolled and tossed upon one of Mrs. Fortune's soft beds, oblivious to the kind offices of those about him. They had taken him there at Kate's command, and she had worn herself to a shadow with anguish, love and penitence. She watched him by day and by night—in her restless dreams; her whole existence was in the tossing victim of her folly. Every twitch of that pain-stricken body seemed to show her that he was shrinking from her in hatred. Her pretty face was white and drawn, the blue eyes dark and pitiful, the merry mouth plaintive in its hopelessness.

And those jovial tricksters—those who had jeered over his lack of courage, the testing of which they had undertaken! They were smitten by their own curses, haunted by their own shame. The fiery Trask, the polished Farring, the ingenious Holmes, with all of Jamestown, prayed for his recovery, and spared no pains to bring to life and health the man who had

won that which they had relinquished hope of having—Kate's love. They were tender, sympathetic, helpful—true men and good.

Kate could not forget the look of disgust she had seen upon Studdiford's face as he stood above her with the great sword in his hand. His first thought had been to kill her!

Sitting beside him, bathing the fevered brow, caressing the rumpled hair, holding his restless hands, she could feel her heart thumping like lead, so heavy had it grown in the fear of his awakening.

Finally the doctors told her that he would recover, that the fever was broken. Then came the day when he slept, cool and quiet, no trace of fever, no sign of pain.

It was then that Kate forsook him, burying herself in her distant room, guilty and heart-broken, fearing above all things on earth the first repellent glance he would bestow upon her. Once, while he slept, she peered through his door, going back to her room and her spinning with tears blinding the plaintive blue eyes.

At last, one day, her mother came from the Captain's room and said to her gently:

"Kate, Captain Studdiford asks why you do not come to see him. He tells me that for three days he has suffered because you have been so unkind. Go to him, dear; he promises he will not plead his love if it is so distasteful to you!"

Distasteful! The girl grew faint with wonder. Her limbs trembled, her lips parted, her eyes blurred

and her ears roared with the rush of blood from her heart.

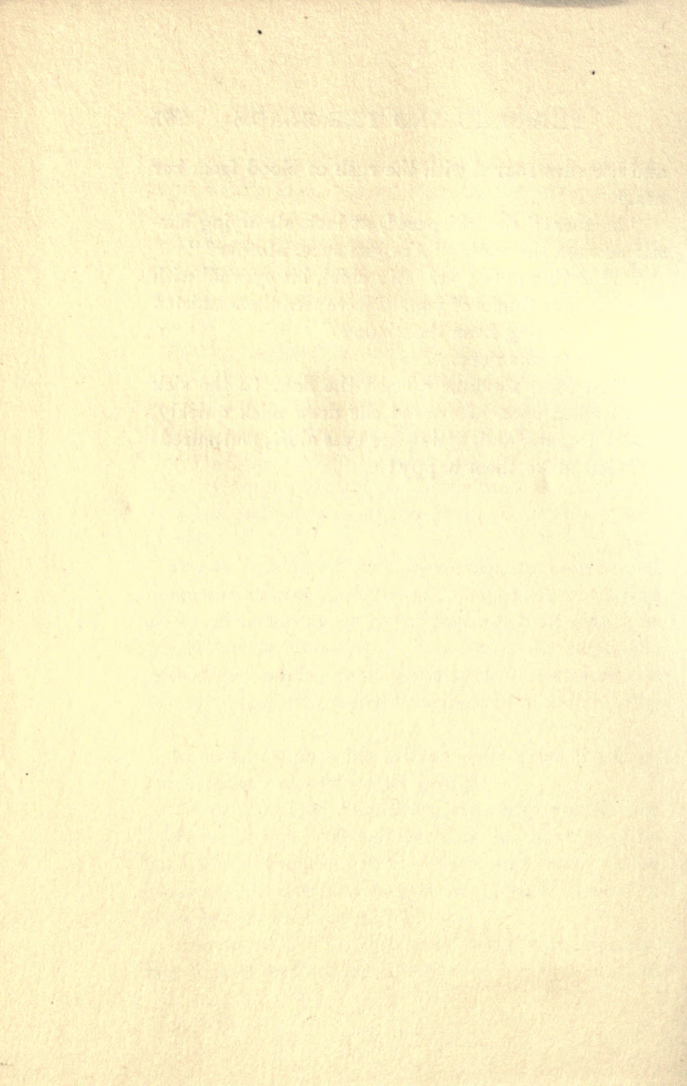
"Mother!" she whispered, at last, steadying herself against the wall. "Are you sure, Mother?"

"That he wants you? My child, his eyes fill with tears when he thinks of you. I have seen them moisten as he lies looking from the window."

But Kate was gone.

When Mrs. Fortune opened the door to the sick man's room soon afterward she drew back quickly, closed it again, and, lifting her eyes aloft, murmured:

"God make them happy!"





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